The "corrupt bargain" controversy of the presidential election of 1824, as revealed in the Adams papers

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THE "CORRUPT BARGAIN" CONTROVERSY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION OF 1824, AS REVEALED IN THE ADAMS PAPERS

by

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INTRODUCTION

The ten years from the end of the War of 1812 to the election of 1824 has been generally designated by both contemporary observers and later historians as "The Era of Good Feeling" because of the decline of political and sectional conflicts which characterized the period.

In spite of the general acceptance of the term, there seems to be some difference of opinion among historians over its origin. According to Louis C. Hatch, the phrase first appeared during a debate in the House of Representatives as "The Era of Good Feeling" in reference to the absence of political rancor in that body, but he makes no attempt to date the event. In opposition to this point of view, Eugene H. Roseboom maintains that the term was first used by the Boston Centinel to describe President Monroe's visit to New England early in his first term. Whatever the origin, the use of the term soon became widespread to designate a period "which came to be viewed in retrospect as a golden age of patriotism and moderation."

According to the traditional historical view of the period, the tranquility of the era had two basic causes; first, the wave of nationalistic feeling which swept over the country in the wake of the American victory in the War of 1812; and second, the gradual decline and disappear-

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3Hatch, op. cit., p. 153.
ance of the Federalist party, which left the Republicans in complete control of the political field and which made inter-party conflict impossible.

The decline of the Federalist party had begun with the Alien and Sedition acts and the dispute between Alexander Hamilton and John Adams over foreign policy. Hamilton himself apparently foresaw the eventual demise of the party as early as 1802, for in April of that year, in a letter to James A. Bayard of Delaware, he outlined a new "front" organization which was designed to revive the fallen fortunes of the dying party. Before and during the War of 1812 the Federalist party underwent a brief revival during the dispute over the non-intercourse policy. But the failure of the party members to support the war effort attached an irremovable stigma of treason to the Federalists.

Coupled with this stigma of treason, and contributing perhaps even more to the ever-decreasing influence of the Federalist party, was their obvious distrust of democracy. They felt that the popular and triumphant Jeffersonians were confusing equality with crass mediocrity. In direct opposition to prevalent public opinion, these Federalists advocated "qualified" as opposed to "whole hog" democracy.

Many historians feel that one of the most important causes of this wave of democratic feeling which was sweeping the country -- and incidentally contributing to the ultimate destruction of the Federalist

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1 Hatch, op. cit., p. 153.
2 W. E. Binkley, American Political Parties - Their Natural History (New York, 1943), p. 97.
party — was the growing importance and influence of the west. By 1820 six new western states had been admitted to the Union, and the census of that year indicated that 32 per cent of the population lived in that region and elected 47 of 213 Representatives and 18 of 48 Senators.

And, what was perhaps more important, this growing influence of the west on the political affairs of the nation was a democratizing influence, for in all but one of the new states the right to vote had been extended to all adult white males, and this encouraged the older, eastern states to adopt universal suffrage in an attempt to discourage the tide of westward migration.

Economic conditions also encouraged the spread of democracy during a period in which the country underwent a radical and sweeping evolution from a rural, colonial, handicraft economy to an industrial nation. New methods of transportation, coupled with an expanding suffrage, provided an entirely new political environment for the voters. Increased suffrage resulted in the emergence of labor as a political force. The depression of 1819, encouraging class conflict for the first time since the Jeffersonian era, made these newly-enfranchised Americans conscious of the fact that politics had an intimate relation to their welfare.

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8 Binkley, op. cit., p. 100.
9 John Bach McMaster, A History of the People of the United States (New York, 1900), p. 50.
To some historians, this popular unrest based on economic frustrations was not confined to workingmen, but also felt by such "vigorous classes" as southern planters and small farmers in the north and west who believed the central government to be hostile to their needs and interests. Other historians agree that the economic changes of the period encouraged democracy, but a democracy which was "greedy, intolerant, imperialistic, and lawless," and which transformed "Liberty" into "laissez faire." According to this view, the new democracy gave rise to a concept of earned wealth which extolled the virtues of the self-made man as superior to the hereditary rich, and which utilized agrarian terms in the economic battle of entrepreneur against capitalist, banker against regulation, and Wall Street against Chestnut. The driving force behind the expanding democracy, this interpretation continues, was "the self-employed entrepreneurs" who were struggling for a more important and profitable place in the economy, against the older "elite group" of businessmen who were more conservative politically. Even in the west economic conditions were seen by some as basic to the demands of the frontiersman for political power. Individual ownership of land and the sense of proprietorship felt by the westerner encouraged individuality, self-reliance,

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15 Van Deusen, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
and a belief in complete social equality which tended to encourage democracy.\(^\text{16}\)

Among the other factors which have been considered as possible causes of the rise of democracy during this period, Glyndon Van Deusen lists the after-effects of the political idealism of the American Revolution, the logical development of the Jeffersonian ideal of a wide popular support for government, and the practicing politician's realization that advocacy of the expansion of the suffrage would result in the support of that advocate by the newly-enfranchised masses.\(^\text{17}\)

Whatever the reason or reasons for the extension of the suffrage, Federalism seemed to have no place in the growing democracy of the period. The stricken party finally stopped breathing in 1820, when it failed to present a ticket.

* * * *

Although the Federalist party had died, its traditions remained very much alive. Most Federalists apparently found their way into the swelling ranks of the Republican party, where their influence modified that party's agrarianism to correspond more closely with a pro-business viewpoint.\(^\text{18}\) This "Federalising" of the Republican party had begun when the pressures of the War of 1812 had caused the Madison administration to adopt many Federalist principles. During Monroe's first term, all but irreconcilable Federalists had moved over into the Republic column, where

\(^{16}\) Johnson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 300.

\(^{17}\) Van Deusen, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 11-12.

\(^{18}\) Binkley, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 98.
they "gave the economic program of Hamilton a kindlier aspect and a more ingratiating vocabulary."19

The members of the old Federalist party who joined the Republican ranks united behind Henry Clay. Those die-hards who could not bring themselves to join the Republicans could be found marching behind the banner of Daniel Webster, who "was at once recognized as the chief and head of all that remained of the great party."20 Of the latter, or "irreconcilable" group, some took refuge in the courts, which John Marshall "proposed to make an impregnable fortress," and in the churches, where they mobilized religion to "hedge the aristocracy of wealth with divinity."21 Some, of course, retired from politics.

With only one political party in the field, there could be no party conflict as such. But can the period really be considered an "Era of Good Feeling" for this reason alone? Some historians indicate that while it might have been justly called a "unique period of one-party government,"22 an "abnormality,"23 an "armistice,"24 or even "a busy regrouping of old forces and old passions under new names,"25 it was

19Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 11.
20Henry Cabot Lodge, Daniel Webster (Boston, 1893), p. 131.
21Schlesinger, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
23Roseboom, op. cit., p. 76.
scarcey an "Era of Good Feeling." In fact, according to these views, a better name could be the "Era of Bad Feeling," when bitter personal, sectional, and local struggles temporarily replaced national party warfare. Those who share this view of the period see it as a "crazy quilt of disharmonies and contradictions" in which there was constant political and personal bickering. In fact, one eminent critic, Frederick J. Turner, states:

The reader who has followed the evidences of a factional controversy among the rival presidential candidates in the cabinet, and noted the wide-spread distress following the panic of 1819, the growing sectional jealousies, the first skirmishes in the slavery struggle and the clamor of a democracy eager to assert its control and profoundly distrustful of the reigning political powers will question the reality of this good feeling.

But, in addition to the diametrically-opposed views of the traditionalists who see the period as an "Era of Good Feelings" because of the lack of party conflict, and the later historians, who feel that it was really an "Era of Bad Feelings" because of the political animosity exhibited on the state, local, and personal levels, there is still a third view. The latter interprets the period as an "Era of Good Feelings" not despite, but because of the factionalisms, animosities, and hatreds which characterize it. Morton Borden, one exponent of this third view, sees a "strong, buoyant, ... optimistic, ... proud and prosperous America" as resting "in a trough of picayune local disagreements" because there were no grave national issues to divide the people.

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27 Turner, op. cit., p. 265.
as there had been before the War of 1812, and as there later were during
the 1820's and 1830's. 28

In the midst of the bitter animosities and personal hatreds, and
in strange contrast with the feverish activity going on around him, sat
James Monroe, "patient . . . dispassionate . . . [with] candor, fair-
mindedness, and magnanimity . . . attributed to him even by those who
were engaged in bitter rivalry." 29 His poise, patience, and dignity,
rather than acting to quiet the bickering and discord around him, seemed
instead to encourage it. Since he was not a dynamic or inspiring leader,
since there was no sense of party allegiance to him, 30 and since he
seemed to be unable to create and insist upon a definite policy, 31 his
second term soon degenerated into a "wilderness of intrigue." 32

With Monroe exercising no more control than if he had remained
in Virginia, 33 the power and prestige of the presidency steadily deterio-
rated, and John Quincy Adams, his Secretary of State, shouldered much of
the administration's responsibility. Even the "Monroe Doctrine" was the
work of Adams. And as the presidency declined, Congress moved in to
fill the vacuum. By accepting congressional solutions to perplexing

29 Turner, op. cit., p. 266.
31 Turner, op. cit., p. 198.
33 Binkley, op. cit., p. 100.
problems, Monroe made it possible for Congress to overshadow the president during the period, although it too, under the pressures of the day, tended to degenerate into an arena for the conflicts between rival factions.35

The partisan bickering reached a peak in the upper echelons of the administration, the cabinet itself. Even Monroe's patience and dignity finally gave way. When Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford, busily maneuvering to place himself in a position where he could succeed Monroe, called the president a "damned, infernal old scoundrel" because Monroe had failed to make certain appointments at Crawford's request, "Monroe grabbed some fire-tongs and threatened to ring for servants to throw him out of the White House."36 This was the same Crawford who had been narrowly defeated by Monroe in a congressional caucus for the nomination for the presidency in 1816 by the margin of 11 votes, in an election which was looked upon by at least one observer as the beginning shot in the campaign of 1824.37

In the campaign of 1820 the chief interest was not in the re-election of James Monroe, which was conceded by everyone, but in the choice of his successor. To illustrate this, a congressional caucus which was held in April, 1820, to nominate Henry Clay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, for the vice-presidency, was able to take no action because of the fear of some members that Clay would use the

35Turner, op. cit., p. 177.
36Bemis, op. cit., p. 16.
37Turner, loc. cit.
position as a stepping-stone to the Presidency.\textsuperscript{38}

Monroe was not elected unanimously in 1820 -- one vote was cast against him by William Plumer of New Hampshire. Why Plumer did not vote for Monroe remains somewhat of a mystery. The traditional view has it that Plumer did not vote for Monroe because he wanted to prevent any other man from equalling the unanimous vote that Washington received in 1788 and 1792. Others, however, feel that Plumer's motive was simply a belief that Monroe did not have enough ability for the job.\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, in keeping with the view that the election of 1820 was nothing more than the first round in the battle of 1824, one historian feels that Plumer voted for John Quincy Adams instead of Monroe "in order to register Adams before the people for 1824."\textsuperscript{40}

Some of Monroe's supporters, appalled at the struggle that was building up within the administration as the election of 1824 approached, and realizing that the number of potential candidates would probably result in an election by the House of Representatives, suggested Monroe as a candidate for a third term.\textsuperscript{41} But the matter was dropped and the field opened to an all-out, no-holds-barred fight between five leading candidates.


\textsuperscript{39}Hatch, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 155.

\textsuperscript{40}Bemis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{41}McMaster, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 51.
CHAPTER I

THE CANDIDATES

Who were the contenders for the highest office in the land in 1821, and how had they come to be considered for this position?

The first candidate officially entered the race for the presidency in 1821, when the South Carolina legislature nominated John C. Calhoun, then Monroe's Secretary of War. Calhoun, who was to be the youngest of the candidates, had appeared on the national political scene in 1811, when he was elected to the House of Representatives. In the House he had been one of the "War Hawks," and a champion of the "new" school of Jeffersonians which had emerged during the War of 1812 and who favored a tariff and internal improvements. Calhoun's views on these major issues later led him to look toward the north for support during the campaign.¹

Considered by some historians to be a powerful analyst who was "brilliant to the point of rashness,"² Calhoun is looked upon by others as a contradictory character who had the air of an arch-conspirator, and who ambitiously pursued the presidency while busily pretending that he did not want the office.³ The apparent contradiction of Calhoun's reversal of his stand on internal improvements and the tariff between 1817 and

¹ Roseboom, op. cit., p. 80.
² Van Deusen, Clay, p. 166.
³ Bemis, op. cit., p. 18.
1828, is explained by Frederick J. Turner as being due primarily to his environment. Calhoun, Turner maintains, had been born to a frontier family, and as a result had been a democratic, idealistic, political theorist in his youth. Later, when his native region changed from a frontier to a cotton-and-slave region, Calhoun's viewpoint changed, too.¹

Not all historians agree with the traditional view of Calhoun as the foremost spokesman of the planter aristocracy of the south. Some instead see him as a "philosopher of reaction," whose anticipation of the class struggle and support of an alliance between planters of the south and manufacturers of the north made him a forerunner of Marxist-style economic determinism.⁵ One of these historians claims that Calhoun's analysis of American politics and the sectional struggle "foreshadowed some of the seminal ideas of Marx's system...[and] placed the central ideas of scientific socialism in an inverted framework of moral values and produced an arresting defense of reaction."⁶ Still another observer denies that Calhoun was the spokesman for the planter aristocracy, and instead portrays him as a leader of the back-country masses in a search for democracy.⁷

Whatever the interpretations of Calhoun's character and motives, there seems to be little doubt that he desired the presidency, and had a

¹Turner, op. cit., pp. 183-84.


⁶Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 68.

good chance of getting it, especially if any event should occur to hurt the chances of John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay. As late as the beginning of 1823, Calhoun was looked upon as the only candidate with a chance against Adams, especially among the ex-Federalists of New England, who were still angry over Adams' "desertion" during the War of 1812. Still, his chances were bound to be hurt by the general feeling that the north was "entitled" to the next term of the presidency.

The second contender entered the political arena in 1822, when the Tennessee legislature nominated Andrew Jackson, the "Hero of New Orleans." At the time of his nomination, Jackson was living in retirement at his Tennessee plantation, after having resigned as Governor of Florida the previous year. In retirement or out, however, "Old Hickory" was a figure of national importance, and had been since leading a backwoods militia to victory over the British at New Orleans. Jackson had by turns been a veteran of the American Revolution when a mere boy; a member of the Tennessee Constitutional Convention of 1796 (where tradition has it he named the state); a former member of Congress; a justice of the Supreme Court of Tennessee; a commander-in-chief of the Tennessee Militia; a major-general in the U. S. Army; and conqueror of Florida. Andrew Jackson needed no introduction to the American people.

The traditional view of the emergence of Andrew Jackson on the American political scene according to prevalent twentieth-century

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9 Ibid., p. 367.

10 J. T. Mart, John Quincy Adams (Boston, 1882), p. 149.
textbook doctrine\textsuperscript{11} sees Jackson as the personification of the Declaration of Independence, who, in response to a plaintive call from the masses, "came, like the great folk heroes, to lead them out of captivity and bondage."\textsuperscript{12} To such an exponent of this "traditional" view as Turner, Jackson was "the very personification of ... democracy," and the "incarnation of the popular idea of democracy."\textsuperscript{13}

To some recent historians, however, Jackson was a demagogue, not a democrat; an aristocrat, not a frontiersman; a political opportunist who capitalized on an immense personal popularity to bring political power to himself and his unscrupulous backers. Thomas P. Abernethy, for example, maintains that Jackson was a political opportunist, who, instead of championing the people's cause, encouraged them to champion his.\textsuperscript{14} According to this view, Jackson's political successes were a result rather than a cause of the rise of democracy, with Jackson supporting a democratic movement (which he little understood) because it supported him.\textsuperscript{15} And in direct opposition to the traditional view of a reluctant Jackson who did not seek the presidency, members of this school of historians see in Jackson a clever politician who skillfully refused to commit himself on the issues of the day,\textsuperscript{16} but instead tailored his

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{11}Cunliffe, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 150.
\item\textsuperscript{12}Schlesinger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 43.
\item\textsuperscript{13}Turner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 190.
\item\textsuperscript{14}Thomas P. Abernethy, "Andrew Jackson and the Rise of Southwestern Democracy," American Historical Review, XXXIII, p. 76.
\item\textsuperscript{15}Thomas P. Abernethy, "Andrew Jackson," the Dictionary of American Biography, IX, p. 531.
\item\textsuperscript{16}Van Deen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 169.
\end{itemize}
campaign to appeal to all sections of the electorate.\(^{17}\) In line with this picture of Jackson as politician \textit{par excellence}, we see him substituting his image as a public hero for a stand on issues which might cost him votes,\(^{18}\) and capitalizing on his tremendous personal popularity among the politically-illiterate.\(^{19}\)

To counter the traditional view of Jackson as a frontiersman, Richard Hofstadter points out that "from the beginning of his career in Tennessee he considered himself to be and was accepted as an aristocrat, and his tastes, manners, and style of life were shaped accordingly."\(^{20}\) Another historian sharing this point of view even denies that Jackson had founded what has been traditionally called "Jacksonian Democracy," pointing out that it was really William Carroll, a political opponent of Jackson in Tennessee who was "the real father of the democratic movement" in that state.\(^{21}\) The most recent biographer of Andrew Jackson states that Old Hickory "contributed little or nothing to the development of popular rule" in the years before he became president.\(^{22}\) And still another recent observer agrees that "Jacksonian Democracy" in Tennessee predated Jackson.\(^{23}\)

\(^{19}\)James, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 384.
\(^{21}\)Van Deusen, \textit{Clay}, p. 68.
\(^{22}\)Syrett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 21.
\(^{23}\)Cunliffe, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 154.
Some historians even question the long-supported view that Jackson was first and foremost a westerner, supported by the west. Bray Hammond, for example, sees much of Jackson's support coming from New York financial interests as well as the west, and Hofstadter looks upon Jackson's eventual triumph in 1828 as neither an uprising of the west against the east, nor a mandate for economic reform, but rather as the result of a militant nationalism coupled with the demand for equal access to office.

In 1822, the same year that the Tennessee legislature backed Jackson for the presidency, the Republican members of the Kentucky legislature nominated Henry Clay, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Clay had been born in Virginia during the Revolution, and orphaned at seventeen. A successful frontier lawyer, he soon found himself in Congress, where he was boosted into the speakership by his fellow "War Hawks."

Easily "the most personable candidate," Clay was a warm-hearted, dashing, self-confident, extrovert. Although he is generally recognized as a powerful orator who loved active leadership, he has been called by one historian "a strong leader, but a weak guide" whose imagination often

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24 In defense of Jackson's apparent support of creditors against debtors in Tennessee which gave rise to the above charges, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. says that Jackson's motive in so doing was not to protect the banks, but to prevent inflation. (Schlesinger, op. cit., pp. 36, 37) Schlesinger gives no reason for Jackson's support of a measure which would have "despoiled many small farmers of their lands for the benefit of speculators," however. (Ibid., p. 37.)

25 Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 54.

26 James, op. cit., p. 368.
ran away with him,27 and whose quick perception went hand-in-hand with superficial thought. By nature an impulsive gamester, the impetuous Clay was prey to vehement impulses, which, when coupled with an imperious temper and an ardently combative nature, led him to make rash attacks on his political foes and at times assume arrogant and dictatorial attitudes.

Traditionally, Clay is remembered as the "great conciliator,"28 whose paramount aim was to preserve the Union in such crises as the Missouri controversy, the nullification dispute of 1833, and the Compromise of 1850. In foreign affairs, too, Clay is well-remembered for fashioning a policy which strengthened the prestige of the nation at Ghent, where he had "fought a good fight,"29 in his support of the South American republics in their fight for independence, and in the pacificatory influence exercised over the Senate in his later years.

It is in domestic affairs, however, where Clay's star shone most brightly. As Speaker of the House of Representatives, and later as Senator, Clay acted as opposition leader and watchful critic of the government. In this role he is given credit for providing a basis for the development of a strong and stable two-party system of government.30 His most widely-known contribution on the domestic scene, however, is probably the "American System." Clay proposed the combination of a protective tariff with internal improvements to tie the various sections of

29Van Deusen, Clay, p. 106.
the country together into a smoothly-working, coordinated economic unit. His activities in this area have led one historian to rank him with Hamilton as an apostle of economic nationalism who anticipated the industrial revolution which was to transform America.\(^{31}\) And another critic sees him as carrying out the old Federalist plan to orient society around the business and industrial classes.\(^{32}\) In yet another view, however, he is interpreted in a very different light — as a better Jeffersonian than Jacksonian.\(^{33}\) Such diametrically-opposed views of Clay have led to the comments that no positive image of Clay really exists,\(^{34}\) and that he cannot be typed as either a liberal or a conservative.\(^{35}\)

One possible explanation for these controversial interpretations may be discovered in the fact that Clay started his career as a spokesman of the west, who gradually switched his point of view as he gained favor with the east, until his increasingly conservative point of view gradually began to alienate the democrats in the west. Clay’s most recent biographer, Van Deusen, believes Clay was sympathetic in spirit with the agrarian west, but at the same time was a protagonist of the industrial east, both of which forces he attempted to draw together in his "American

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 195.

\(^{32}\) Schlesinger, op. cit., pp. 11-12.


\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Eaton, op. cit., p. 296.
This actually logical but seemingly contradictory task has led some critics to accuse him of modifying his opinions to conform to what was politically expedient, but later observers have recognized no such inconsistency in his actions.

The fourth candidate to enter the race officially was Monroe's Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams. A joint meeting of Republican members of the Massachusetts legislature and delegates from several towns nominated Adams for the presidency in January, 1823. Like Jackson, Adams had spent much of his life in the service of his country. At the age of eleven he had accompanied his father to France. By his twenty-sixth birthday, he had been appointed American minister to The Hague, and three years later (in 1797), he was transferred to Berlin. In 1802 he was elected to the Senate, and although a Federalist, voted for the embargo, an act which led to his defeat in the following election. Then appointed as minister to Russia and commissioner to Ghent, after the War of 1812 he was rewarded with the commission as American minister to Great Britain. In 1817 he joined Monroe's cabinet. The state department was looked upon as the stepping-stone to the presidency, and so Monroe, who was well aware of northern discontent at the prospect of the succession of another Virginian, went to New England for Adams, who was eminently qualified for the position by his background.

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36 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 424.
37 Schurz, op. cit., p. 412.
39 Roseboom, op. cit., p. 75.
Adams' training for the presidency had been so thorough that it has been said that his parents planned it that way. The "best-equipped and most experienced statesman that America had up to that time produced, Adams was honest to a fault, loyal, experienced, competent, intelligent, and devoted -- on this his biographers seem to be largely agreed. But they are also nearly unanimous in their view that Adams was also blunt, grim, almost rude, puritanic, and austere, petty in small things, as well as being a sharp-tongued, "undiplomatic diplomat" whose aloof, suspicious nature repelled people.

Not all Adams' biographers are as unanimous in their judgements of how vigorously he was willing to campaign for the presidency, however. In most accounts, Adams is pictured as a dedicated public servant, who, although possessed with a "gnawing" ambition to be president, refuses to lower himself to struggle for the office in the political arena. According to a typical view of this nature, Adams is seen as refusing to purchase newspaper support, unwilling to "harangue on his own behalf," and trying to be "civil of speech" as his only concession to campaigning. Other historians paint a very different picture of how far Adams was willing to go to win the presidency. Some commentators see him as firmly

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40 Bemis, op. cit., p. 3
42 Roseboom, op. cit., p. 80.
43 Adams, op. cit., p. 179.
45 Morse, op. cit., p. 166.
resolved not to enter the struggle in the beginning, but gradually losing this resolve until finally, on the eve of the election, he is unwilling to "neglect a single chance" of trying to win support for himself.\textsuperscript{46}

The final figure to officially enter the race for the presidency was William H. Crawford of Georgia, Monroe's Secretary of the Treasury. Crawford was nominated by a poorly-attended congressional caucus in February, 1824. In the late summer of 1823 he had suffered a paralytic stroke which left him "paralyzed in every limb, speechless, nearly blind and nearly deaf."\textsuperscript{47} His backers seem to have attempted to prevent the knowledge of his condition from becoming widespread.\textsuperscript{48} The poor attendance at the caucus was primarily due to a boycott by the supporters of the other candidates who realized that Crawford was certain to get the party nomination as the favorite, and hoped to discredit his nomination.\textsuperscript{49}

Crawford had been born of an impoverished but genteel family in Virginia and raised in Georgia, where he elevated himself to a respectable position by dint of hard work. He had been elected to the Senate in 1806, and had become president of that body in 1812. Later he was minister to France, and had been finally appointed head of the Treasury by Monroe. A controversial figure, Crawford claimed to have the support of the regular Republicans and Jefferson,\textsuperscript{50} although there is evidence that Adams

\textsuperscript{46}Bemis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{47}James, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 376.
\textsuperscript{49}Hatch, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{50}Frederick Ogg, \textit{The Reign of Andrew Jackson} (New Haven, 1921), p. 76.
was really favored by the "Sage of Monticello." Called by some "the purest and ablest statesman of his day" who had every right to the presidency he had almost won in 1816, he is looked upon by others as a scheming and wholly selfish politician whose only claim to fame was as author of an act in 1820 which would limit the terms of certain presidential appointees to four years. This act is looked upon by some historians as "an electioneering device" on Crawford's part which was designed to secure subservience to himself among the treasury officials.

Others deny that there is any truth to this charge.

One other man, De Witt Clinton, governor of New York and "Father of the Erie Canal," had been mentioned as a possible candidate for the presidency. A hostile New York legislature which was controlled by Martin Van Buren and the "Albany Regency," however, refused to put him forward for consideration.

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52 Claude Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period (Boston, 1922), p. 106.
53 Channing, op. cit., p. 353.
55 Roseboom, op. cit., p. 81.
CHAPTER II

THE ELECTION

While some historians maintain that the candidates themselves actually did very little campaigning in the modern sense of the word,\(^1\) competition between them and among their supporters reached a frenzy in Monroe's second term:

The ambitious bickerings of Crawford and Calhoun rent the Cabinet, while their friends warred in the South to gain advantage. Confusion was only worse confounded when Clay returned to the House and Jackson came to the Senate of the Eighteenth Congress, both busily seeking favor.\(^2\)

The previous Congress, too, had "degenerated into a mere arena for the conflicts of rival personal factions" -- in the words of Frederick Jackson Turner.\(^3\)

Certain observers feel that there was little choice between the candidates in 1824 because they were members of the same political party and took basically the same stands on issues.\(^4\) In addition, some candidates refused to take a definite stand on some particular issues because in doing so they would be likely to alienate other factions of the Repub-

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\(^1\)Ogg, op. cit., p. 82.
\(^2\)Van Deusen, Clay, p. 167.
\(^3\)Turner, op. cit., p. 194.
\(^4\)Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 157.
lican party, without whose support they would be unable to win. Turner feels that they were forced by public pressure to declare themselves on the more important questions, but refused to take definite stands otherwise for fear of losing votes.

To an extent, therefore, the campaign was more of a personality contest than any battle between representatives of conflicting ideologies. The major candidates even found themselves searching for principles to back.

This view, that personalities rather than issues were the major factors in the campaign of 1824, is not shared by all historians. Marquis James, for example, discovers important issues in the campaign under the superficial personality clashes. And Allen Johnson feels that these points of difference were formed in congressional debates early in 1824, and entered the campaign soon after. Among the most important of these issues were: internal improvements at federal expense; nationalism versus sectionalism; the effects of slavery in general and the Missouri controversy in particular; the Florida treaty; economic factors, such as the depression of 1819, and the tariff; and finally, growing democracy and its effects, including attacks on the nominating and electing mechanisms.

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5 Hatch, op. cit., p. 157.
6 Turner, op. cit., p. 257.
7 Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 162.
8 James, op. cit., p. 364.
9 Johnson, op. cit., p. 308.
Sectionalism is looked upon as being an important factor in the election by many historians. The problems facing the country at that time were primarily sectional, and each of the candidates represented different sections of the country. Yet, Marcus Cunliffe tends to minimize the importance of sectional factors in the campaign, maintaining that each candidate had opponents within his own section, and that it was impossible to theorize about any simple cleavage either between sections or between east and west. Eugene Roseboom, however, who sees sectionalism as playing a very important role in the campaign, feels that New England was divided on the tariff question and opposed to internal improvements; the south against higher tariff rates and internal improvements; and the west in favor of a higher tariff and internal improvements. This "new sectionalism," explains Roseboom, was responsible for the end of Monroe's one-party system.

Results of the balloting are employed as evidence to support the view that sectionalism was an important factor in the election. After all, Adams captured the New England vote, and Clay's strength was in the Ohio valley, where his "American System" had much appeal. Sectionalism has even been blamed for the fact that less than one-third as many voters went to the polls in 1824 as in 1828, because the triumph of particular candidates in certain states was supposed to be so assured that voters lost interest in the contest in these states.

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10 Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 76.
12 Roseboom, op. cit., pp. 78, 79.
Economic factors which seemed to be of considerable importance during the election of 1824 were the tariff and depression of 1819. The depression greatly encouraged popular political activity, especially on the part of the land buyers in the south and west who were pressed to the wall by foreclosures.13 Other segments of society dissatisfied with economic conditions of the period were the workingmen of the northern and middle states, who were unhappy with the American System; and the planters in the south, who were discontented with falling cotton prices.14 Those groups who were hurt by adverse economic conditions tended to unite behind Jackson, according to Turner.15 But the influence of these economic factors on the outcome of the election are played down by some observers, who feel that the effects of the depression and panic of 1819 were largely over by 1824.16 Hostility toward banks and creditors had disappeared from the scene by that time, to be replaced by animosity toward established political machines.17

The attitude of the candidates toward economic factors were as varied as the attitude of historians toward the effects of these factors on the election. Calhoun favored and supported a high tariff and internal improvements, which gained him support in the north, particularly in

14 Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 33.
15 Turner, op. cit., p. 191.
16 Johnson, op. cit., p. 309.
17 Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 53.
Pennsylvania. Clay, of course, was the champion of the tariff and the father of the American System and internal improvements. Adams, while he seems to have "nedged" on the matter of the tariff, was more open in support of internal improvements, where he "proceeded to outstrip Henry Clay." Jackson, too, was evasive on the major issues, but his voting record in the Senate and contemporary letters indicates that he favored internal improvements and a "judicious" tariff. Jackson's main justification for internal improvements seemed to be based on the need for military preparedness. At this stage of development, Jackson does not seem to possess the hatred of the national bank which characterized his later years. While in the Senate he did not oppose the Bank of the United States, and at least one observer attributes Jackson's later attitude toward the Bank to Martin Van Buren's influence.

The only one of the five principle candidates whose stand on economic measures differed appreciably from the others was Crawford. Most historians seem to feel that Crawford, like Adams and Jackson, was intentionally ambiguous in his attitude toward the tariff, preferring to create the general impression that he accepted and reflected his sections' viewpoint. Yet Ulrich Phillips maintains that Crawford was inclined to favor

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18 Turner, op. cit., p. 196.
20 James, op. cit., p. 361.
23 Abernethy, American Historical Review, p. 76.
"moderate" protection.\(^2\) His stand on the matter of internal improvements seems to have been intentionally cloudy, however.\(^2\) Generally, Crawford's espoused views seemed to parallel those of the traditional Jeffersonian Republicans, stressing democracy, economy, reform, and states' right.\(^2\)

Because of the similarity and ambiguity of the views of the major candidates, voters — as already noted — tended to concentrate on personality differences. This confusion over issues also may have been at least partially responsible for the concentration of Crawford's opponents on the "undemocratic" aspects of the congressional caucus system of nominating presidential candidates. This, coupled with the entrance of the masses into the political arena for the first time, led to such a public outcry against the caucus that Hofstadter sees it as one of the two "chief" issues of the campaign.\(^2\)

The congressional caucus system of nominating candidates for the presidency came into being, according to Thomas Hart Benton, when "the eminent men of the Revolution, to whom public opinion awarded a preference, were passing away, and when new men, of more equal pretensions, were coming upon the scene."\(^2\) Benton goes on to point out that public sentiment was followed, not led, by these earlier caucuses. Although the

\(^2\)Turner, op. cit., p. 256.
\(^2\)James, op. cit., p. 365.
\(^2\)Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 53.
\(^2\)Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years in the U. S. Senate (New York, 1897), p. 29.
caucus was an old and respected institution, it had come under criticism as early as the election of 1816, when the main interest in the campaign was provided by attacks on the caucus. In 1820 it was "poorly attended."

According to Allen Johnson, growing democracy led to an increased dissatisfaction with the caucus method of selecting candidates on the part of the newly-enfranchised masses, and finally to a refusal by the rank and file party members to allow the party leaders to dictate to them. The people remonstrated against a system which had maintained the Virginia dynasty by mechanically promoting the Secretary of State to the presidency. The west, led the opposition to the caucus, and Turner sees Jackson's nomination by the Tennessee legislature as the signal of the revolt by the states against the caucus. Since the caucus was considered undemocratic and out of step with the times, it had to go, and there were many who were willing to speed it on its way:

All the candidates but Crawford were against the caucus. All the newspapers, except those devoted to Crawford, were against it. Several of the state legislatures adopted strong resolutions in reprehension of it. Public meetings denounced it. Ponderous essays were hurled at it; facetious squibs assailed it . . . the torrent . . . rolled on in ever-increasing strength.

29James, op. cit., p. 388.
30Roseboom, op. cit., p. 75.
31Johnson, op. cit., p. 305.
32Binkley, op. cit., p. 100.
33Turner, op. cit., p. 252.
Leading the fight against the caucus were the Jackson supporters, whose main line of attack was their demand that the people be allowed to select the president, either by direction election or by voting for the electors. Jacksonians in the Tennessee legislature even adopted a resolution against the caucus, in which they asked other states to concur. In this protest, the legislators objected to the caucus on the grounds that it was unconstitutional, "inexpedient and impolitic," worked to the disadvantage of the weaker states, forced members of Congress who might later be asked to choose the president to "prejudge the case" by pledging their support of certain candidates, and finally, endangered the liberties of the people by giving to caucus nominations the force of precedence.

Although the Jacksonians led the fight against the caucus, the other candidates -- with the obvious exception of Crawford -- were equally opposed to it. Congressman George McDuffie of South Carolina observed that Calhoun, Clay, Jackson, and Adams were all out to "give the caucus a death blow" with the objective of ending Crawford's presidential aspirations. Since there was general recognition of the fact that the caucus would select Crawford because he had the largest number of supporters in Congress, the opposition of the other candidates to the caucus was probably based on something more than concern for the

35 Turner, op. cit., p. 252.
37 James, op. cit., p. 388.
38 Benton, op. cit., p. 49.
people's welfare. Marquis James observes that "the record fails to confirm the implication that had Jackson, Adams, Clay or Calhoun been able to raise up the support in Congress enjoyed by Mr. Crawford, there would not have been so much high-handed indignation against the caucus." 39 Whatever their motives, thundering opposition to the caucus by four-fifths of the politicians and newspapers in the country made an impression. Crawford's opponents, realizing his strength, boycotted the caucus, and the smallness of the attendance weakened its already diminished authority. 40 The caucus died with Crawford's hopes in the election of 1824.

Another immediate and obvious effect of the entrance of the masses into politics was seen in the increasing public criticism of the electoral college as a method of selecting the president, and the concurrent demand that candidates for that office be selected by direct popular election. In a typical situation, a "popular outburst" in New York forced the state legislature to go through the motions of providing a popular electoral law. This ruse failed to deceive the people, and the electorate punished the legislators at the polls the following November. 41

In the attack on the electoral system as well as in the attack on the caucus, the Jacksonians were again in the foreground. Thomas Hart Benton, a leading Jackson supporter, advocated a system which he felt would be more democratic. In Benton's system, the people would vote

39 James, op. cit., p. 388.
40 Hatch, op. cit., p. 164.
directly for the president and vice-president, with a second election
two highest candidates provided if no candidate had a majority
on the first ballot.\textsuperscript{42} In a proposed amendment to the Constitution, Ben­
ton suggested that presidential elections should be held by districts,
with each State divided into as many districts as it had senators and
representatives, and each district to cast one ballot separately. If no
candidate had a majority, a run-off election between the two highest
would be held on the same basis.\textsuperscript{43}

Though the Jacksonians led the pack in advocating democracy in
response to the rising political power of the masses, the other candi­
dates seemed to be just as aware of the increasing importance of the
newly-enfranchised voter, and just as determined to capture his vote.
Crawford, Adams, Clay, and Calhoun were "mindful of the awakening of the
masses, \[and each striving\] to clothe himself in the garments of the
people's true and original friend."\textsuperscript{44} Such an astute politician as
John C. Calhoun, in a conversation with John Quincy Adams as early as
the spring of 1820, observed "an immense revolution of fortunes in every
part a general mass of disaffection to the government not concentrated in
any particular direction, but ready to seize upon any event and looking
out anywhere for a leader."\textsuperscript{45} All the presidential candidates made it

\textsuperscript{42} Benton, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 49-50.
\textsuperscript{43} W. M. Meigs, \textit{The Life of Thomas Hart Benton} (Philadelphia,
1904), p. 151.
\textsuperscript{44} James, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 355.
\textsuperscript{45} Hofstadter, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 50-51.
necessary for them to find issues with a nation-wide popular appeal. As Marcus Cunliffe comments, "political power lay waiting to be seized by whoever could most artfully appeal to the ordinary man."^16

So another result of the growing enfranchisement of the mass of the people was to be the emergence of the demagogue. "As poor farmers and workers gained the ballot, there developed a type of politician that had existed only in embryo in the Jeffersonian period -- the technician of mass leadership, the caterer to mass sentiment."^17 Under these political conditions, "continuous propaganda" became essential to political success."^18 Or, in the words of Thomas Abernethy:

Electioneering, unknown in the earlier days, grew rapidly in vogue during the period following 1819. Stump speaking came to be an art, and cajolery a profession, while whiskey flowed freely at the hustings. The politicians could most easily attain their objectives by appealing to the prejudices of the masses . . . the ignorant were asked to elect the ignorant because enlightenment and intelligence were not democratic."^9

This was the period in which such terms as "logrolling," "Gerrymandering," "lobbyist," and "noncommittal" became part of the American political vocabulary. A typical representative of this new-type of American politician was Martin Van Buren of New York, "The Sly Fox of Kinderhook," whom Marcus Cunliffe characterizes as "a manipulator . . . with his quick, temporizing, managerial skill, his tact, and his

^17 Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 49.
^19 Abernethy, op. cit., p. 70.
^20 Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 179.
professional affability [which] established him as a representative of the American democracy.\textsuperscript{51} James Parton, in looking back at the election of 1824, observed that the majority of voters in that election were not "enlightened," and therefore:

not intelligent enough to be moved by arguments addressed to the understanding... [they] could feel, but not think; listen to stump orations but not read;... could be wheedled, and flattered, and drilled by any man who was quite devoid of public spirit, principle, and shame... Here was the field of the managing politician. These were the voters who were the hope of the schemer, the despair of the patriot. They were numerous in 1825.\textsuperscript{52}

One final factor which had some effect on the outcome of the election of 1824 was the Missouri question and the related slavery issue. Of all the candidates, Adams seems to have had the clearest understanding of the true significance of the coming dispute over slavery, and prophetically viewed slavery as a possible basis for political division, and even a menace to the Union.\textsuperscript{53} But he refused to commit himself openly as either for or against the institution.\textsuperscript{54} Generally, the opinion seems to be that Adams received a few votes from the anti-slavery men, but that Missouri was of little importance in the election. Yet Turner feels that the Missouri controversy was of considerable significance. It caused a split between Pennsylvania and New York, which hurt Crawford; put Clay on the spot as a compromiser; benefitted Adams as a northern candidate; and helped Jackson as a slave-holder who was favored in the south for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51}Ibid., pp. 6, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{52}Parton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 119.
\item \textsuperscript{53}Turner, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 193, 194.
\item \textsuperscript{54}Bemis, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 26-27.
\end{itemize}
this reason, but voted for in the anti-slavery states as a friend of democracy. 55

As the campaign entered the spring and summer of 1823, Crawford was apparently leading the contestants 56 as the "regular" candidate and the favorite of the politicians. 57 But as the favorite he came in for heavy attacks from the other candidates. 58

Disaster in three separate forms destroyed Crawford's chances. In addition to the stroke of paralysis and the stigma of having been nominated by the "undemocratic" caucus, Crawford's cause was scuttled in New York. Here a young newspaperman, Thurlow Weed, made a secret deal with one of the Clay men which secured most of the votes for Adams. Weed thus outwitted the professional politicians of the Albany Regency, and its leader, Martin Van Buren, who were backing Crawford. 59

The New York election was also one of the major causes of Clay's downfall. In the bargaining for votes in New York, the Adams' forces, led by Weed, had guaranteed Clay the seven votes that were estimated to be needed to put his name before the House of Representatives as one of the three top candidates. As Speaker, Clay would have been in a very good position to win. But because of trickery on the part of the Adams' men, Clay wound up with four instead of seven electoral votes, and was

56 Turner, op. cit., p. 248.
57 Shepard, op. cit., p. 91.
58 Phillips, op. cit., p. 529.
59 Roseboom, op. cit., p. 83.
beaten for third place by Crawford. Clay would still have had a chance if he had carried Louisiana, as he was expected to do because of his nomination by that state. For some reason, however, his expected support never materialized. One explanation is that three of his backers in the Louisiana legislature became so "seriously indisposed" that they were unable to attend. The five electoral votes of the state, which would have brought Clay's name before the House, were divided between Adams and Jackson.

Another once-serious contender, John C. Calhoun, was eliminated in a state race, when Pennsylvania went for Jackson. Jackson's unexpected showing in the Keystone state is explained by Wilfred Binkley as being due to his popularity among the "extreme" democrats in the western part of the state. Other observers see the wide-spread publicity given a letter Jackson's backers had him write to a Pennsylvania bar-keeper extolling the virtues of democracy, and pro-Jackson propaganda and popular animosity toward the caucus, as being decisive factors in Pennsylvania. In any event, Calhoun was defeated at the hands of the Jackson forces in Pennsylvania and withdrew from the race to concentrate on the vice-presidential contest. And with Calhoun's withdrawal from the race, his supporters in North and South Carolina, Maryland, and New Jersey were free to go over to the Jackson camp in exchange for second place on

60 Van Deusen, Clay, pp. 176-78.
62 Binkley, op. cit., p. 110.
63 James, op. cit., p. 363.
the ticket for their man. 64

All through the campaign, every possible coalition between the candidates was explored, and these schemes indicate the confused character of the politics of the period. 65 Among the possible coalitions mentioned at one time or another were those involving Clay and Clinton, Clay and Crawford, Crawford and Adams, Adams and Jackson, Clay and Adams, Jackson and Crawford, Jackson and Clay, Adams and Calhoun, and finally, Jackson and Calhoun.

As election time approached, the campaign that has traditionally been viewed as "the most scurrilous America had known," 66 reached a peak of bitterness and personal animosity. In the words of Glyndon Van Deusen:

The bitterest charges and counter-charges were made by the partisans of all the candidates. Adams was accused of a whole category of sins, ranging from slavery-hating to slovenliness. The Crawfordites attacked Calhoun's record as Secretary of War and sought to drive him in disgrace from public life, while the latter's followers retorted in kind upon the Secretary of the Treasury. Jackson was branded a tyrant, a sinister figure, full of unbridled passions. Clay was denounced in the most violent manner. 67

After the scheming, intriguing, maneuvering, plotting, dealing, and character assassination were over, and the smoke of battle cleared away, Jackson was leading with 99 electoral votes, followed by Adams with

64 James, op. cit., p. 390.
65 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 172.
67 Van Deusen, Clay, pp. 171-72.
Eugene Roseboom discounts the significance of Jackson's plurality, pointing out that six of the states had their electoral votes selected by their legislatures, and the popular vote was generally light in the others. Yet James Parton takes the view that the large popular vote for Jackson was a true expression of the will of the people. Public interest in the campaign seems to have begun to wane even before the electors had been chosen. But, after a brief lull, intrigue among the politicians reached a new peak on the eve of the House election. At the center of the alleged manipulations was Henry Clay, who, because of his position as Speaker of the House, was believed to have the power to select the next president.

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68 See Table I on pages 39-40 for the complete results of the election.
69 Roseboom, op. cit., p. 84.
70 Parton, op. cit., p. 51.
71 James, op. cit., p. 414.
### TABLE I

**POPULAR** and **ELECTORAL** VOTES IN THE **PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1824**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Popular vote for Jackson</th>
<th>Popular vote for Adams</th>
<th>Popular vote for Crawford</th>
<th>Popular vote for Clay</th>
<th>Total popular votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>10,289</td>
<td>2,336</td>
<td>3,364</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>12,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. H.</td>
<td>9,389</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>1,978</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>10,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vt.</td>
<td>30,687</td>
<td>6,616</td>
<td>14,552</td>
<td>9,650</td>
<td>43,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass.</td>
<td>2,115</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>9,443</td>
<td>4,167</td>
<td>15,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. I.</td>
<td>7,587</td>
<td>1,978</td>
<td>10,197</td>
<td>9,262</td>
<td>36,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conn.</td>
<td>10,986</td>
<td>9,110</td>
<td>21,291</td>
<td>9,650</td>
<td>47,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Y.</td>
<td>36,100</td>
<td>5,113</td>
<td>14,632</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>53,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del.</td>
<td>11,523</td>
<td>11,632</td>
<td>31,291</td>
<td>17,331</td>
<td>62,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Md.</td>
<td>2,861</td>
<td>3,189</td>
<td>19,292</td>
<td>1,047</td>
<td>35,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Va.</td>
<td>2,115</td>
<td>18,687</td>
<td>36,036</td>
<td>14,922</td>
<td>93,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. C.</td>
<td>3,231</td>
<td>1,691</td>
<td>21,291</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>36,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. C.</td>
<td>6,455</td>
<td>3,280</td>
<td>17,331</td>
<td>14,223</td>
<td>40,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala.</td>
<td>3,231</td>
<td>1,691</td>
<td>21,291</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>36,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss.</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>1,691</td>
<td>21,291</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>36,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La.</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>1,691</td>
<td>21,291</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>36,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent.</td>
<td>6,455</td>
<td>3,280</td>
<td>17,331</td>
<td>14,223</td>
<td>40,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenn.</td>
<td>20,197</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>21,291</td>
<td>14,223</td>
<td>56,836</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mo.</td>
<td>9,877</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>1,401</td>
<td>2,699</td>
<td>14,268</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>18,457</td>
<td>12,280</td>
<td>19,255</td>
<td>14,223</td>
<td>54,215</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>7,343</td>
<td>3,095</td>
<td>5,315</td>
<td>15,753</td>
<td>20,005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ill.</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>1,582</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>1,047</td>
<td>4,768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Popular Votes:**

- **152,901**
- **111,023**
- **46,979**
- **17,217**
- **361,120**

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*Electors were selected by the state legislatures.*


*McMaster, *op. cit.*, p. 76.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Electoral vote for Jackson</th>
<th>Electoral vote for Adams</th>
<th>Electoral vote for Crawford</th>
<th>Electoral vote for Clay</th>
<th>Total electoral vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
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Free white males over 18: 58,302.
CHAPTER III

THE "CORRUPT BARGAIN"

After the selection of the top three candidates by the electoral college, and before the final election by the House, most of the voters apparently lost interest in the matter, satisfied that Jackson would win the election in the House.¹

This same attitude of nonchalance was not shared by the politicians themselves, however, and the political intriguing that had characterized Monroe's second term was renewed and increased as the impending House election approached. And the focal point of this intriguing was the Speaker of the House himself, Henry Clay, whom most observers, then and now, felt was in a position to select the next president of the United States. The political machinations which took place are complicated and difficult to unravel, but basically involve two questions -- alleged overtures or bribes made to Clay; and alleged overtures or bribes made by Clay. There are some historians who feel that even Clay, with his extreme force of personality and persuasive powers, could not alone insure the election of the candidate of his choice.² Politicians of that day, however, apparently felt that Clay was in a position to influence the selection, and there is evidence that backers of all three

¹James, op. cit., p. 414.
²Roseboom, op. cit., p. 87.
candidates, with or without the consent of their principals, approached Clay.\(^3\) Jackson's backers approached Clay, and Crawford's campaign manager and chief backer, Martin Van Buren, had before the election suggested an alliance between Clay and Crawford based on the supposition that Crawford's poor state of health would make the vice-presidency a very attractive position. The Adams' forces, too, realized they must get Clay's support, for there was no possibility of an alliance with Crawford -- only Clay could swing the necessary western states from Jackson.\(^4\)

The vote in the House of Representatives hinged on the vote of the New York delegation, and that vote was tied, 17-17 with the forces of Adams opposing the forces of Van Buren and the Albany Regency, who were supporting Crawford. The weak link in the Van Buren chain was General Stephen Van Rensselaer, an old Federalist and brother-in-law of Alexander Hamilton. Van Buren had felt that Van Rensselaer was wavering, and had extracted a pledge from him to vote for Crawford. But just before the election, Clay steered him into the Speaker's private room, where with Daniel Webster "these two masters of persuasion plied Van Rensselaer with every word, every argument, every artifice at their command,"\(^5\) but the aged patroon held firm. While Webster and Clay had not been able to wring a concession from Van Rensselaer, they did reduce him to such a state of nervous agitation that he felt obliged to look to Divine Guidance for help. Lowering his head to pray, his eyes fell on a slip of paper on the floor.

\(^3\)Van Deusen, Clay, p. 180.
\(^4\)James, op. cit., p. 406.
\(^5\)Ibid., pp. 437, 438.
with Adams' name written on it -- the sign that he had been looking for. He picked it up, placed it in the ballot box, and Adams was elected. 6

In any event, when Clay finally announced his intentions of supporting Adams early in January, Jackson's backers rose up in righteous indignation, pronouncing Clay's decision to be a violation of the will of the people and the direct result of a "corrupt bargain" between Clay and Adams. Jackson himself was apparently easily convinced that Clay had entered into an immoral pact with Adams, especially when Adams appointed Clay Secretary of State in the new administration, and Jackson's reaction was short and to the point: "So you see," he wrote, "the Judas of the West has closed the contract and will receive the thirty pieces of silver." 7

The first formal charge that Clay had entered into a "corrupt bargain" with Adams was made twenty days after Clay had announced his intentions of supporting Adams in the coming House election, and two weeks before the election itself. The specific charge was made in an anonymous letter to the Columbian Observer, a Philadelphia newspaper. The letter, dated January 25, 1825, read in part as follows:

DEAR SIR: I take up my pen to inform you of one of the most disgraceful transactions that ever covered with infamy the republican ranks. Would you believe that men, professing democracy could be found base enough to lay the ax at the very root of the tree of liberty! ... such a bargain as can only by equaled by the famous Burr conspiracy of 1801. For some time past, the friends of Clay have hinted that they, like the Swiss, would fight for those who pay best. Overtures were said to have been made by the friends of Adams to the friends of Clay, offering him the appointment of Secretary of State, for

6 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 191.
7 Ibid., p. 193.
his aid to elect Adams. And the friends of Clay gave the information to the friends of Jackson, and hinted that if the friends of Jackson would offer the same price, they would close with them. But none of the friends of Jackson would descend to such mean barter and sale. . . . It is now ascertained to a certainty that Henry Clay has transferred his interest to John Quincy Adams. As a consideration for this abandonment of duty to his constituents, it is said and believed, should this unholy coalition prevail, Clay is to be appointed Secretary of State. . . .

To make certain that Clay saw the letter, the editor of the Observer sent him a marked copy. Clay was provoked into answering in a letter which appeared in the National Intelligencer of January 31, in which he pronounced the writer of the letter in the Observer "a base and infamous caluminator, a dastard, and a liar," and promised to deal with him on the field of honor.⁹

Three days later, on February 3, another letter appeared in the Intelligencer in which the author identified himself as the writer of the letter in the Observer, and offered to prove the charges. The admitted author of the letter was George Kremer, a member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania, variously described as "simple-minded and eccentric," "slow-witted," "illiterate," and "hitherto conspicuous only because of the leopard-skin coat he wore on the floor of the House."¹³ Upon finding that Kremer had written the letter, Clay's

⁸Parton, op. cit., p. 103.
⁹Van Deusen, Clay, p. 189.
¹⁰Bemis, op. cit., p. 57.
¹¹Roseboom, op. cit., p. 87.
¹²Parton, op. cit., p. 104.
¹³James, op. cit., p. 434.
ardor cooled. He avoided a duel on the assumption that Kremer was not worthy to summon to the field of honor. But he did demand an investigation.

At first Kremer appeared willing to substantiate the charge, volunteering to appear before any properly constituted body to offer proof. But later, when confronted by Clay's friends, Kremer appeared bewildered, and denied that he had charged Clay with corruption. When the committee chosen by the House asked him to appear to present evidence, he refused, and at one point even seemed to be on the point of signing an apology to Clay.14

During the investigation the committee refused to summon and cross-examine witnesses, possibly because the Jacksonians on the committee became afraid that the charge might backfire and alienate some of Clay's friends who might be willing to support Jackson. Clay himself seemed strangely hesitant to press the investigation any harder, possibly because "every side had its secret to guard."15 It has also been suggested that the Jackson forces themselves may have wanted to see the investigation dropped to prevent the fact that they had been backing Kremer in his accusations from being revealed.16 In any event, the committee faded from sight, to re-emerge on February 9, the day of the election in the House. Whether the committee took no action because it was evident that

14Van Deusen, Clay, p. 190.
15James, op. cit., p. 435.
16Turner, op. cit., p. 268.
there was no proof behind the charge, as one historian claims;\textsuperscript{17} or
whether they reported that there was no basis for the charge, as another
asserts;\textsuperscript{18} or whether their report was only "milk-and-water" as a third
claims\textsuperscript{19} — the investigation accomplished nothing.

Most historians seem to think that Kremer did not write the letter
himself, but that it was composed by one of Jackson's backers, who merely
used Kremer as a "tool." Parton believes that Kremer actually admitted
that he did not write the letter, but did not identify the author.\textsuperscript{20}
Clay himself seemed to be of the opinion that Senator John H. Eaton of
Tennessee, long a Jackson supporter, was the guilty party, although
Eaton denied authorship when accused by Clay.\textsuperscript{21} Still another suggested
culprit was James Buchanan, then a member of the House from Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to the difference of opinion among historians over
who actually wrote the letter, there is also some question as to the ori­
gin of the "corrupt bargain" charge itself. Most scholars seem to feel
that Jackson's camp followers were the perpetrators of the accusation
because they had the most to gain by it. Such a charge had a good chance
of forcing Clay to oppose Adams in order to disprove the allegation. And
if Clay nevertheless decided to support Adams in spite of the charge, he

\textsuperscript{17} Roseboom, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{18} Bemis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{19} James, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{20} Parton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{21} Mallory, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{22} Ogg, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 90.
would be discouraged from accepting an appointment in the new administration for fear of lending credence to the accusation. Finally, such a charge, if accepted widely, would benefit the Jacksonians by damaging the reputations of Adams and Clay for the campaign of 1828.

There are other historians, however, who feel that the charge was not originated by the Jacksonians, but rather utilized by them. Marquis James, for example, believes that "it came from the country = West, South and to a slight extent East." Glyndon Van Deusen points out that even before Kremer's letter appeared, different newspapers controlled by Crawford, as well as Jackson, attacked Clay for supporting Adams.

If Jackson's backers had made the "corrupt bargain" charge in order to force Clay to abandon Adams, they were disappointed. On January 8, 1825, Clay announced his intention of supporting Adams in a letter to one of his lieutenants in Kentucky, Francis P. Blair. Clay informed Blair that he was backing Adams as a "choice of evils." In spite of the "bargain" charge, Clay stood behind Adams, and was instrumental in securing his election by the House a month later.

And if the Jacksonians had hoped the charge would keep Clay from accepting a position in the new administration, they were again disappointed. On February 12, three days after the election by the House, Adams designated Clay to be Secretary of State. In a letter to Monroe written the day before the announcement of Clay's appointment, Adams

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23 James, op. cit., p. 142.
24 Van Deusen, Clay, pp. 189, 190.
25 James, op. cit., pp. 425, 426.
stated his reasons for selecting Clay as "due to his talents and services to the western section of the Union, whence he comes; and to the confidence in me manifested by their delegations."

In light of the later uproar over the "bargain" and the resultant effects on the careers of Adams and Clay, many observers have been at a loss to explain why Adams made the offer and why Clay accepted it. Perhaps Adams and Clay never gauged the amount of animosity that would be stirred up by the appointment. Clay, himself, seems to have been surprised by the intensity of the tempest, although as a seasoned politician he expected some adverse comment. Adams' friends initially had urged Clay to take a position in the cabinet, but the violence and volume of criticism later caused them to request Clay to turn the post down because of the adverse effects it was sure to visit upon the new administration.

In one way, the "corrupt bargain" charge probably encouraged Adams to make the appointment and Clay to accept it, for "if the accusation was a challenge to the spirited Kentuckian, it was a call to duty to the Puritan." And by this time, Clay seemed sure to be criticized whether he accepted the position or not. Finally, one might reason, as does the historian Edward Channing, that if Clay refused the post he would be giving color to the charge.

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26 Johnson, op. cit., p. 315.
27 James, op. cit., p. 433.
28 Ibid., p. 433.
29 Turner, op. cit., p. 269.
30 Adams, op. cit., p. 188.
Whatever the motives of Adams in appointing Clay, and in Clay's accepting the appointment, the results were undeniable, and altered the course of American politics for years. The new administration suffered an untold amount of damage by being placed on the defensive from the earliest moments of its existence. Because of the charge, Adams became the first president to be confronted with a Congress intentionally and deliberately organized against an administration which rapidly became a "four-year martyrdom." 31

As for Clay, almost all commentators conclude that the episode was detrimental to his later career. Samuel F. Bemis believes that Clay was deprived of the presidency by the charge. 32 Clay, himself, is quoted by Channing as saying that he would not have accepted the Secretaryship if he had to do it over because by doing so he injured Adams and himself politically. 33 Glyndon Van Deusen repeats the statement that Clay in later years publicly acknowledged that accepting Adams' offer was "a political mistake of the first magnitude." 34 And apparently Adams, too, lived to regret the appointment. 35 Only one observer believes that the charge did not damage Clay to any extent because the ire of the people was directed primarily against the system then in existence, and not the election of Adams. 36

31 Adams, op. cit., p. 188.
32 Bemis, op. cit., p. 131.
33 Channing, op. cit., p. 361, footnote.
34 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 192.
35 Bemis, op. cit., p. 131.
36 William MacDonald, Jacksonian Democracy (New York, 1906), pp. 31, 32.
On the other hand, the charge probably benefitted Jackson in inverse proportion to the damage it did Clay and Adams. In the first place, it tied Jackson's name almost inseparably with democracy. In keeping with this appearance, Jackson later made a plea for a constitutional amendment which would render congressmen ineligible for administrative offices for a two-year period following the end of their term of office. In addition, when he became president, he repeated a suggestion for the popular election of the executive in all of his eight messages to congress.

Another long-term effect of the "bargain* charge was the part it played in helping to create two new political parties to take the place of the now-defunct Federalist and Republican parties which had faded from the political scene during the "Era of Good Feeling." In the face of the "bargain* charge and Clay's appointment, the anti-Adams forces united with the Jacksonians, a move which has been hailed as "a landmark in the history of American party politics." Now unified under the same political banner were southerners who hated the tariff and feared a strong central government's opposition to slavery; high-tariff men from the north who disliked Clay and/or Adams; and demagogues who preyed on the newly-enfranchised masses — held together by one thing they all had in common, veneration of Jackson and hatred of Adams and Clay. The opposing camp contained just as many diverse elements: ex-Federalists following the leadership of Daniel Webster; former Jeffersonian Democrats; high-tariff men; and western champions of internal improvements at national expense — a group generally more conservative than the

37Sinkley, _ibid_, p. 114.
Jacksonians, but lacking a common focal point of direction and leadership.

In the face of the tremendous uproar touched off by Clay's support of Adams in the House election and Adams' subsequent appointment of Clay to the State Department, both Adams and Clay protested what they obviously felt were unfounded charges. Clay went so far as to secure written testimony from members of the House to the effect that they had voted for Adams only because they thought that it was their duty to do so. Clay introduced evidences to prove that he had decided to vote for Adams even before departing from Kentucky, and that Jackson and Crawford supporters had solicited his support by even more shameful offers than the one he was accused of accepting. Adams did not dignify the accusation with a formal protest until after the expiration of his term of office, at which time he vehemently swore that the charge was "totally unfounded." But the net result of all these protestations seemed to only make people more aware of the charge.

Most historians, especially those examining the evidence long after the partisan passions that had provoked the charge had subsided, declared that the accusation was completely unfounded. Typical comments on the matter are: "no definite agreement;" the falsity of the charge has been proved as nearly as a negative can be; and "entirely

38 Channing, op. cit., p. 367.
Parton, op. cit., p. 117.
Hatch, op. cit., p. 166.
Johnson, op. cit., p. 315.
destitute of foundation, or even shadow of proof!\[^43\] Even pro-Jackson contemporaries, such as R. G. Horton, in his campaign biography of Buchanan,\[^44\] as well as Thomas Hart Benton\[^45\] and James Parton,\[^46\] declared the charge to be without foundation.

While most latter-day historians have been as emphatic in denying the existence of any "corruption" in the pre-election negotiations between Adams and Clay as their predecessors were, there seems to be an increasing number of observers who are not quite so quick to deny that any "bargain" did exist between the two men. In fact, some of these historians have even gone so far as to acknowledge the existence of such a "bargain," but deny that it was in any way "corrupt," preferring instead to call it a "gentleman's agreement," "implicit bargain,"\[^47\] or "entente cordiale,"\[^48\] but not a "corrupt bargain." Turner claims that Adams walked perilously, if safely, along the edge of his conscience at this time,\[^49\] but avoided engaging in any "vulgar bargaining" with Clay.\[^49\]

These later historians, who admit the existence of a "bargain"

\[^45\] Benton, op. cit., p. 118.
\[^46\] Marquis James, however, quotes Benton as saying earlier that "no man, in his right senses, at the public scene of action as I was" could fail to believe that a "bargain" did exist. (James, op. cit., p. 445).
\[^47\] E. Bemis, op. cit., p. 59.
\[^48\] Van Deusen, Clay, p. 187.
\[^49\] Turner, op. cit., p. 262.
but deny that it was "corrupt," seem to take delight in pointing out that "more recent generations have been inclined to wonder at the furore and to speculate on the number of presidents who have gained office without pledges and bargains." And some members of this historical school take equal pleasure in pointing out that Jackson's backers had approached Clay with a proposal similar to the one Adams' friends were supposed to have made. Indeed, "the friends of all three candidates rushed to court the Kentuckian's favor and to insinuate attractive rewards," Van Deusen concludes. James Buchanan hinted to Clay that he might have the Secretaryship of State if he supported Jackson, and then Buchanan hinted to Jackson that Clay's support in the House election might be had in exchange for the pledge that Jackson would not appoint Adams to head the State Department. Sam Houston, another Jackson supporter, is pictured telling the Ohio delegation that their support of Jackson in the House would result in the elevation of Clay to the head of the State Department. Even Adams' maneuvering on the eve of the House election in an effort to obtain support seems to be used to minimize the severity of the "bargain" charge: "the implicit but certainly not corrupt bargain between Adams and Clay was the least questionable of the several deals ... that Adams made to secure election by the House of Representatives."
Buchanan's role in the pre-election maneuvering came to light three years after the disputed election. In a dinner at the Hermitage, Jackson mentioned that Clay's forces had offered to support him in 1824. Present at the affair was Carter Beverly from Virginia, who recounted Jackson's remark in a letter which was later published in a North Carolina newspaper. Clay then published a denial and demanded that Jackson identify the "friend" of Clay who had approached him with the offer. Jackson named Buchanan.\textsuperscript{55}

When confronted with the accusation, Buchanan issued a statement in which he admitted contacting Jackson before the election, but on his own initiative, and not as a representative of Clay. Buchanan claimed that he had asked Jackson if he would appoint Adams Secretary of State if he were elected, but that Jackson had replied that this was a secret he would never reveal.\textsuperscript{56} In another slightly different version of this episode, Buchanan is said to have told Jackson that Clay's friends had been approached by representatives of Adams with the offer of the job of Secretary of State in exchange for support in the upcoming House election. If Jackson would publicly declare against continuing Adams as Secretary of State, then "a complete union of Mr. Clay and his friends would put an end to the presidential contest in one hour."\textsuperscript{57} What were Buchanan's motives in making this visit? Marquis James feels that he may have wanted to help Jackson in spite of himself, and to spare Clay the danger of making the visit himself.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Parton, op. cit., p. 111.
\textsuperscript{56} Parton, \textit{Life}, p. 275.
\textsuperscript{57} James, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 422.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
After contacting Jackson while posing as a representative of Clay without Clay's permission or knowledge, Buchanan then visited Clay. Instead of telling the Kentuckian what Jackson actually had said, Buchanan hinted to him that he could have the Secretaryship of State if he was willing to support Jackson for the presidency. According to the nineteenth-century historian, James Parton, Clay had once threatened to reveal this overture, when the "bargain" charge was being used by his political opponents, but that Buchanan's "earnest entreaties" had induced Clay to refrain from such action.\(^5\)

In addition to the majority of historians who seem to place no stock in the truth of the "corrupt bargain" charge, and the minority of historians who seem to feel that there was an "agreement" but certainly no "bargain" any more "corrupt" than the many other manipulations and negotiations of that or later periods, there is at least one historian who is willing to claim that a "corrupt bargain" did exist between Clay and Adams, and expends no effort trying to devise a euphemism to soften the shock. In his *Life of Andrew Jackson*, Marquis James, after presenting detailed evidence in an attempt to prove that a "bargain" did exist between Adams and Clay, summarizes his evidence by saying:

> Before coming to Washington, Clay hoped to be able to bring about a situation whereby he could benefit himself by supporting Adams; upon his arrival there he assumed an attitude of aloofness designed to put the Adams' people on the anxious

\(^5\)Parton, *op. cit.*, p. 57. In Morse's biography of Adams, he claims that Buchanan tried to pass the blame to a fictitious "Mr. Markley," when confronted by Clay's demand to know who had gone to Jackson as Clay's representative, and when that ruse failed, that Buchanan claimed that Jackson had "misunderstood" their conversation. (Morse, *op. cit.*, p. 185.)
seat and bring them to his terms; after which Mr. Adams met the
terms. The alternative is an assumption that Clay's support of
Adams and Adams's appointment of Clay were merely a coincidence.60

In answer to Clay's later claim that he had decided to back Adams
before leaving Kentucky, and that a bargain over that support in December
would therefore be most unlikely, James points out that if such a decision
had actually been made Clay kept it such a well-guarded secret that even
his most-trusted confidants were kept in the dark. Clay carefully hid
his intentions to support Adams, James believes, until he had maneuvered
himself into a stronger political position — i.e., when he could control
the votes of enough Congressman to insure the election of Adams. Accord­
ing to this view, Clay's cordial behavior toward Jackson was designed to
lead the General's backers to hope that Clay would indeed support Jackson,
and Adams' men to fear this, and therefore be more willing to "bargain."61

Other historians, however, feel that Clay had never seriously
considered Jackson for the presidency. Furthermore, they reason that
Clay had decided to support Adams two months before the election, and had
revealed this choice to his friends. To prove conclusively that Clay had
decided to back Adams even before the electors were chosen in the fall of
1824, Glyndon Van Deusen claims that John J. Crittenden, Colonel James
Davidson, and Francis P. Blair all heard Clay state that he would support
Adams if the election went to the House. In addition, Van Deusen states
that Clay told Thomas Hart Benton early in December that he intended to
vote for Adams, and that he also revealed the same decision to Lafayette
later in the same month,

60James, op. cit., p. 852.
61Ibid.
Clay's reason for not announcing his intentions openly, Van Deusen maintains, was to avoid making any public proclamation before he was able to ascertain the lay of the land. Mallory thinks Clay failed to reveal his decision because he wanted to avoid the "unhealthy excitement" generated by all caucuses and intrigues.

James, however, refuses to acknowledge that these earlier remarks by Clay could be classified as commitments, and maintains that they were rather "tentative expressions which politicians less adroit than Henry Clay repudiate with impunity." In addition, James points out that political secrets are traditionally so difficult to keep that the claim that Crittenden, Davidson, Blair, and the other Clay backers knew that Clay would support Adams but kept this secret, tends to "impose a strain upon credulity." Furthermore, there is much evidence to show that Clay had many reasons to back Jackson rather than Adams or Crawford. Unlike Crawford, Jackson had relatively good health, and a western view on the tariff and internal improvements which corresponded to Clay's. Also, the differences between Clay and Jackson seemed to be heading toward an adjustment, and Clay and Adams had fought each other as bitterly as Clay and Jackson ever had. Clay had opposed the most important measures of Monroe's administration, such as the Spanish treaty which was Adams' pride, in a series of disputes which had grown out of the negotiations at Ghent in 1814.

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62 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 184.
63 Mallory, op. cit., p. 129.
64 James, op. cit., p. 425.
65 Ibid., p. 427.
In rebuttal to James, however, other historians insist that Clay had ample reason for disliking Jackson and supporting Adams. In the first place, Clay is said to have felt that Adams was more qualified for the presidency, in view of his extensive experience in governmental affairs. With regard to Jackson's qualifications for the position, Clay wrote to Blair that he could not see where "killing 2,500 Englishmen at New Orleans qualified for the various, difficult and complicated duties of the Chief Magistracy." That he disliked the puritanical Adams is not denied; but it is pointed out that he hated Adams less than he hated Jackson, and chose him as the lesser of the two evils. The long and checkered relationship between Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay apparently began in the fall of 1806. Clay, then a Lexington lawyer, represented Jackson, then a Nashville merchant, in a civil suit. Clay's first extended personal contact with Jackson came in the fall of 1815, when the two met at Washington. At this stage of development, the relationship was "marked with cordiality on both sides," with Jackson promising to spend a week visiting Clay the following summer, and writing a letter of regret when unable to do so.

The cordiality which characterized this meeting was not long-lived. A few years later Clay denounced Jackson's role in the Seminole war, particularly criticizing the treaty Jackson had forced upon the

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66 Morse, op. cit., p. 171.
67 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 183.
68 Roseboom, op. cit., p. 84.
69 Bernard Mayo, Henry Clay (Boston, 1937), p. 95.
70 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 181.
Creeks in 1814, the hanging of captured Indian chiefs, the executing of Arbuthnot and Ambrister, and the seizure of St. Marks. This attack, which is said to have "earned for Henry Clay the hatred of a man who never forgot and seldom forgave," marked the beginning of a long series of bitter clashes between the two men. And the attack marked the first time that Clay pointed to the danger of the triumph of a "military chieftain" over civil authority. Clay's reasons for attacking Jackson were apparently pure, but since both Clay and Jackson were considered presidential aspirants, his motives were subject to suspicion.

Following his denunciation of Jackson in the House, Clay paid a visit to him, but the call was not returned. When the two met at a tavern in Kentucky the following summer, Jackson barely spoke to Clay. In 1823, when both were rivals for the presidency, some of Jackson's friends attempted to effect a reconciliation. They explained to Clay that Jackson's rudeness at the tavern meeting had been due to an illness on the General's part. Clay and Jackson then dined together several times, and relations between them were temporarily amicable. Carl Schurz has implied that the reason for the attempted conciliation at this time was due to the fact that "Jackson himself thought it good policy now to be on pleasant terms with Clay." James Parton, however,

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71 Ibid., p. 126.
73 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 181.
74 Ibid., p. 182.
75 Schurz, op. cit., p. 237.
attributes it to Jackson's extreme good humor due to his feeling that his victory in the impending election was certain. In fact, Parton points out that at this time Jackson also effected reconciliations with several other enemies of long-standing, among them General Winfield Scott and Thomas Hart Benton.\(^76\)

Whatever the reason, the truce between the two was of short duration, and "the embers of jealousy and dislike were smouldering, ready to burst into flame."\(^77\) The wind that fanned the spark came from Clay's announcement of his intentions of supporting Adams in the House election, and the feud was reopened, to last until the day of Jackson's death. In the words of Carl Schurz: "There was no fiercer hater than Andrew Jackson, and no man whom he hated so fiercely as he did Henry Clay. That hatred was the passion of the last twenty years of his life."\(^78\)

Clay, too, had ample reason to dislike and refuse to support Jackson. In addition to Clay's previously-mentioned fear of Jackson as the "man on horseback," there was little to unite the two men. Clay was certain that Jackson's background did not qualify him to fill the highest office in the land, and he doubted that Jackson really understood, much less supported, Clay's "American System."\(^79\) As early as 1804, Clay had opposed and defeated policies in the Kentucky legislature which later came to be viewed as typically "Jacksonian." Finally, Clay had good

\(^{76}\) Parton, op. cit., p. 44.

\(^{77}\) Van Deusen, Clay, p. 182.

\(^{78}\) Schurz, op. cit., p. 328.

\(^{79}\) Roseboom, op. cit., p. 84.
reason to fear Jackson as a political rival for the affections of the west. It would be most unlikely for the Republican party to select a western candidate to succeed a western president. Those historians who hold to this point of view see Clay as jealous of Jackson's popularity in the west. And an all-western alliance with Jackson had already been anticipated by another of Clay's rivals -- John C. Calhoun. Those who prefer to think that Clay supported Adams because of his qualifications and views, and not because of any hope of political reward, point out that Clay and Adams had similar views on foreign affairs, internal improvements, and the tariff. Clay felt that Jackson knew or cared little about these affairs.

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In most traditional historical accounts John Quincy Adams is pictured as a dedicated public servant. Although possessed with a "gnawing" ambition to become president, he would serve only if the people wanted him, and never lower himself to beg for the job. As early as March, 1818, Adams had decided not to seek the presidency openly. He adhered to this position so completely that the closest he came to becoming a campaigner was to try to speak civilly. By his own admission Adams was "reserved, cold, austere," the very opposite of the stereotyped politician. He even refused to purchase newspaper support or dispense offices for his own personal advancement. Adams is portrayed as so honest that he

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80 Turner, op. cit., p. 261.
81 Binkley, op. cit., p. 109.
82 Channing, op. cit., p. 355.
refused to speak to the Pennsylvania Germans in their own language because to do so would be to "harangue;" as willing to run again against Jackson in 1825 if there was some question as to which candidate had the most popular votes; as refusing to do anything to prevent federal office-holders from attacking him after he became president; and finally, as invariably saying "no!" to every "doubtful" suggestion. This, then, is the traditional picture of Adams the Candidate: "blunt, grim, almost rude . . . ready to serve his country in any honorable capacity . . . puritanic, austere, honest, and loyal." It is indeed difficult to conceive of such a man entering into any political "bargain," whether "corrupt" or not.

But other historians envision a very different Adams than the one described in the above paragraph. Adams is described as determined not to lower himself to struggle for the presidency, but is seen as being driven by ambition to gradually weaken and enter the contest by degrees, until he is finally plotting, negotiating, maneuvering, and bargaining as much as any self-seeking politician. Firm at first, but later far from adamant, Adams' first concession to his ambition was an attempt to get rid of his rivals by sending them out of the country on diplomatic missions. He proposed foreign assignments for Clay, Calhoun, Clinton, and Jackson. By the eve of the election of 1824, the solitary, austere, and Puritanical Adams has suddenly become gregarious. "Never at any other time in his

\[83\] Ibid., p. 372.
\[84\] Burgess, op. cit., p. 132.
\[85\] Turner, op. cit., p. 198.
life did he make so many visits to Washington hotels and boarding houses, calling on delegations in the House . . . and their friends. He did not neglect a single chance of trying to win over a state to his support. 86

Finally, Adams secured a working arrangement with a newspaper in Washington, the National Journal, for which he obtained loans for its editors and public printing for its columns. 87

In a sketch and summary of the political negotiations Adams engaged in after undergoing the Jekyll-Hyde transformation outlined above, Samuel F. Bemis sees Adams as: 1) rewarding Daniel P. Cook, a member of the House from Illinois, with a diplomatic junket to Cuba in 1827 for his support in the House election; 2) assuring John Scott of Missouri that Scott's brother, who was in danger of losing his seat as territorial judge for killing another member of the court, would remain on the bench; 3) hinting broadly to Scott that Clay would be appointed to a post in the next administration if the West supported Adams in the House election; 4) telling the ex-Federalist friends of Daniel Webster that the post of minister to England might go to Webster in exchange for support for Adams; 5) promising Henry R. Warfield of Maryland that the Federalist party would not be proscribed by an Adams administration; and finally, 6) supporting Clinton in New York as the People's party candidate for governor, and for a foreign post in the coming administration, in order to win Clinton's partisans in the House. 88

86 Bemis, op. cit., p. 36.
87 James, op. cit., p. 367.
88 Bemis, op. cit., pp. 41-46.
Adams' puritanic moral code was subjected to its greatest strain during the pre-election negotiations between Adams and Robert P. Letcher, and between Adams and Clay himself. Apparently the first meeting between Adams and the Clay forces occurred on December 10, six days before the final election returns arrived from Louisiana, and when the outcome was still in doubt. Letcher called on Adams at the State Department, and Adams returned the call on December 12, after the results of the popular election were known. The topics of conversation between the two men, most naturally, were political conditions in Kentucky and the approaching election. On December 17 Letcher and Adams had what was perhaps the most important conversation of their series of meetings. Bringing the conversation around to the impending election, Letcher informed Adams of growing Jackson strength in Kentucky, and mentioned the possibility that the Kentucky legislature might eventually instruct their delegation in the House to vote for Jackson. Letcher then asked Adams what his attitude toward Clay was, and was assured by Adams that he entertained no feeling of hostility. Letcher made no propositions; nor did he claim to represent

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89 Washington, as the election in the House approached, was full of "busybodies" who went from one candidate to another arranging meetings. In fact, all of the leaders had "friends" and "quasi-managers" who were thus busily engaged. Whether these negotiators actually represented their leaders is a point of dispute. Buchanan, as we have seen, apparently was operating entirely on his own, without the permission of either Clay or Jackson. Apparently Adams himself felt that Letcher, a member of the House from Kentucky and a room-mate of Clay, was acting on Clay's behalf when meeting with Adams; for Adams made the observation that "Letcher was moving for Clay." (Van Deusen, Clay, p. 184)

90 Bemis, op. cit., p. 36.

91 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 184.
Clay. Nevertheless, from the drift of their conversation, Adams came to the conclusion that "Clay would willingly support me if he could thereby serve himself, and the substance of his meaning was, that if Clay's friends could know that he would have a prominent share in the Administration, that might induce them to vote for me, even in the face of instructions." 6 Five days after this meeting, Letcher returned "with definite and thinly-veiled proposals," in which he stressed the importance to Adams of being picked on the first ballot. Letcher was apparently anxious to convince Adams that it might be possible for him to get the vote of Kentucky. To win on the first ballot, however, it would be necessary for Adams to carry Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Louisiana — all states which everyone felt would go to Jackson unless Clay intervened. At the end of the meeting, Adams, the "master of euphemism" and clever diplomat, sent Letbher away with an answer which was apparently not wholly satisfactory. It was after this meeting that Adams made the famous entry in his Diary: "Incendo super ignes" (I walk over fire), which some observers take as evidence of his uneasy conscience. 5

It was necessary for Clay to talk to Adams himself, since Letcher had received no "satisfactory" answer. Accordingly, the two men met at the New Year's day banquet given by congress in honor of

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92 Ibid., pp. 184-5.
93 James, op. cit., p. 425.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
Lafayette. Whether they found themselves seated together by design or by chance, they were on good terms. Clay took the initiative and suggested a later, private meeting, to which Adams agreed, requesting Clay to fix the time. It was on the eve of the meeting with Adams that Clay penned a letter to Blair of Kentucky in which he announced his intentions of supporting Adams. In it he remarked that his decision was a "choice of evils," and that he was obliged to back Adams because he was sure to be elected anyway, since he was second choice in three of four Crawford states, and since it looked as if Ohio was leaning towards Adams. For Kentucky to oppose Ohio, Clay felt, would be to divide friends.

The evening of January 9 Clay called on Adams, and in a three-hour conversation "they went over their past differences, their present views, and their expectations for the future." During the course of the discussion, Clay apparently gave Adams the impression that he had remained neutral thus far in the campaign because of his recent candidacy, and because he wanted his friends to have an impartial choice. Adams records that Clay wished to be reassured on "some principles of great public importance, but without any personal considerations." After Adams' position was made clear, Clay "presumably" said he would come out for Adams. Samuel Bemis speculates that Adams knew what

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96 Roseboom, op. cit., p. 86.
97 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 186.
98 Ibid.
99 Bemis, op. cit., p. 40.
100 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 186.
Clay expected from his previous talks with Letcher, and that "Clay concluded, without explicit assurances, that he could have any situation in the new Cabinet that he wanted." 101

Adams has described this meeting in a letter to William Plumer Jr. But Plumer guessed that Adams did not tell all, and "did not think it decorous to enquire more particularly -- nor did Mr. Adams seem disposed to say anything further of what passed between them." 102 Nor can the inquiring historian go to that fountain of information -- Adams' "Diary" -- to find out what transpired at the meeting, for, as Bemis says:

Adams's Diary breaks off exasperatingly at this point. He left a blank space to write up later. It remains blank to this day. The scrupulous editor of his Memoirs [his son, Charles Francis Adams] explains that the extreme pressure of business and visits (which was certainly enormous at this time) prevented the diarist from filling it in -- and this one of the most important conversations that he ever had in his life! When John Quincy Adams dropped his Diary in such an important matter as this, he let his conscience slip. Incedo super ignes! 103

Whether the negotiations between Clay and Adams constituted a "gentleman's agreement," an "implicit bargain," an "entente cordial," or a "corrupt bargain" has been and still remains a speculative delight of American history scholars.

101 Bemis, op. cit., p. 40.
102 Van Deusen, Clay, p. 186.
103 Bemis, op. cit., p. 40.
CHAPTER IV

THE EVIDENCE IN THE ADAMS' PAPERS

Conflicting historical interpretations of the "corrupt bargain" of 1824 are of ancient vintage. The recent release of the Adams' documents by the Adams Trust and the Massachusetts Historical Society, however, has once again rekindled interest in the problem. Up until the release of the Adams' papers, scholars had to rely upon Charles Francis Adams' Memoirs of John Quincy Adams\(^1\) as the most complete "eye-witness" view of the critical "negotiations" between Adams and Clay on the eve of the election in the House of Representatives. But Charles Francis, while a "scrupulous editor,\(^2\) was nevertheless an Adams -- indeed, the son of John Quincy -- and there has been some speculation as to how much and what kind of material had been rearranged or deleted during the editing process. Access to the actual papers in their original form, particularly John Quincy Adams' "Diary\(^3\) itself, becomes of the utmost importance to the scholar, especially in any discussion of the significance of the omissions from, as well as the inclusions in, the "Diary."

To answer the question immediately: there seems to be little

\(^1\)Charles Francis Adams, The Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848, (Philadelphia, 1874-7), 12 vols. Hereafter referred to as Memoirs.

\(^2\)Bemis, op. cit., p. 40.

\(^3\)See the Appendix (Page 102) for a discussion of the three "Diaries" that make up the "Diary" of the Memoirs.
evidence of intentional bias revealed by an examination of the Memoirs and a comparison with the original "Diary" which was used to compile them, during the vital period (so far as this thesis is concerned) from December, 1824 to March, 1825. Any differences that do exist between the original "Diary" and the text of the Memoirs seem to be primarily errors of a clerical nature, or intentional changes designed to make reading easier, including modernized punctuation and spelling.

If we assume the material included in the Memoirs to be basically accurate, then we must further assume the previous accounts which were written with the Memoirs as a major reference to be accurate also. How then is there any difference of opinion among historians as to the validity of the "corrupt bargain" charge? Because there is ample evidence in the Memoirs that there was a bargain — but also ample evidence that there was not. It is in the recently released private and public correspondence sent and received by the Adams family that new evidence has now become available — and much of it indicates that there was indeed a "bargain" between Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams.

Thus the most logical method of attacking the problem is to rely primarily upon what was included in the "Diary," whether present in the Memoirs or not, and to pay particular attention to correspondence and various miscellaneous sources in the Adams papers to supplement any gaps. Approaching the situation from this standpoint, it is possible to test and determine the relative validity of three different historical interpretations of the "corrupt bargain." (a) The "traditional" historical view of the affair can be stated thus: was Adams a moralistic Puritan
who by nature and training would never enter into any type of political negotiations, not to mention a "corrupt bargain," but whose own honesty and naivete, coupled with the slanderous malice of the Jackson and Crawford supporters, led him to commit a political blunder of the first magnitude? (b) The more "modern" historical view, (but which is based at least in part on the "traditional" approach), is: granted that Adams was a moralistic Puritan, but was he a Puritan whose moral code broke down under the pressure of ambition until he negotiated with the rest of the politicians, even to making "bargains for their support? (c) Finally, the problem stated simply and succinctly by many observers: did the series of meetings between Adams and Clay lead to Clay's support of Adams in the House election and Adams' subsequent appointment of Clay as Secretary of State? In answering this latter question, no attempt should be made to determine the moral implications of the Clay-Adams talks; nor to determine whether a "bargain," if it can be said to have existed, was actually "corrupt," because such a solution is primarily semantic in nature and not historical.

The "traditional" view is apparently in large part based on Adams' own protestations of his innocence and refusal to campaign (in the ordinary sense of the word) during the election. These protestations are amply scattered through the Memoirs.

Representative of this view is a conversation between Adams and General Jacob Brown, Commander of the Army, on December 15, 1824. In the entry in his "Diary" for this date, Adams related how, when he had been encouraged by Brown to try to cultivate friendly relations with DeWitt
Clinton of New York with the object of gaining Clinton's support by offering him a place in the new administration, he had replied that the formation of an administration must take into consideration not only political factors, but "all the great public interests." Again, in a later conversation with Daniel Webster, Adams recorded his refusal to solicit the support of the Federalists by allowing Webster to imply that a place in the administration would have been given to some Federalist. Even after his election by the House of Representatives, Adams criticized the principle of rotation in office (in the "Diary," maintaining that it would "make the government a perpetual and unremitting scramble for office." In another part of the entry for the very same day, Adams claimed that he was "determined to renominate every person, against whom there was no complaint which warrant his removal." As if to illustrate this resolution, Adams refused to remove Allan McLane as collector at Wilmington, Delaware, because the complaints against him were "indefinite."

Another bit of evidence which indicates that Adams was indeed unwilling to bargain for votes, even if it meant the loss of the election, is revealed in a letter from Albert H. Tracy to Adams written December 17, 1838. At the time of the election, Tracy was a member of the lower House

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5John Quincy Adams, "Diary in Abridgement," The Adams Papers, Part I (Boston, 1954), Microfilm reel number 36, entry for February 3, 1825.

6"Diary in Abridgement," op. cit., March 5, 1825.

7Ibid.

8"Letters Received and Other Loose Papers," The Adams Papers, Part IV, (Boston, 1959), Microfilm reel number 510, December 10, 1838.
from New York. The letter asked Adams to verify some facts pertaining to a conversation between Adams and Daniel P. Cook, (member of the House from Illinois), which took place on the eve of the House election. Cook's vote was particularly critical because, as the only member from Illinois, he could determine how the State's entire vote would be cast. Yet, according to Tracy's recollection of the event, Adams would not permit Cook to misinterpret Adams' intentions to Cook's constituents in order to justify Cook's support of Adams. In the letter, Tracy went on to recall the substance of a conversation he had with Cook the day after Cook had discussed the matter with Adams. Cook indicated that he was hesitant to vote for Adams if Adams intended to offer the treasury post to Crawford because of the extreme hostility to Crawford in Illinois. When Cook asked Adams to contradict a rumor then circulating in Illinois to the effect that Adams was contemplating offering the Treasury position to Crawford, by asking Adams to say that he had never "expressed such an intention," Adams was said to have agreed to this, but refused to obtain support for his election by a misinterpretation of his views. By Tracy's memory, Adams had told Cook that although he could safely deny that he had "expressed" any intention of nominating Crawford, the denial would have led Cook's constituents to suppose that Adams had not entertained such an intention. And this would have been misleading, for Adams had indeed entertained such an intention, and had been determined to carry it into effect if elected. Tracy then continued to say that the end result of Adams' honesty was to make it impossible for Cook to promise to support him -- a fact which "exceedingly vexed" Tracy and several other Adams supporters,
although Cook eventually voted for Adams and Adams eventually appointed Crawford. 9

The conversations between Cook and Adams which were recorded in the "Diary" indicate that Adams' main concern at that time was to secure from Cook a written testimony to the effect that Cook had been approached by Samuel D. Ingham, member of the House from Pennsylvania, George McDuffie, member of the House from South Carolina, and Judge J. C. Isaacs of Tennessee, with the view of coercing Cook into supporting Jackson. Cook reported to Adams that in the course of the conversation he had been told by McDuffie that Adams and Clay had made a "corrupt bargain," and that Cook could prevent it from going into effect by throwing his support behind Jackson. Cook denied that the whole election was in his hands; demanded to see any evidence of a "bargain" between Adams and Clay; and stated his determination not to commit himself to any particular candidate, but rather to vote in "the best interests of the country." McDuffie then warned Cook that the blame for any Western state that went for Adams would be shifted onto his shoulders, because without Cook's consent they would not vote for Adams. McDuffie then predicted a great storm of opposition to be organized against the Adams administration which would terminate it after four years, and Ingham foresaw the growth two new political parties based on the results of the election. Cook then answered that the party he would join would depend on his "own judgement as the probable opinion of [his] constituents," and that he thought he would act against the Jackson party. Ingham replied that at

9 Crawford declined the appointment.
the end of four years Jackson would come into the presidency, by an over-
whelming vote of the people, and "Mr. Clay and Mr. Adams would be pro-
strated and driven out."10

After the seriousness of the "corrupt bargain" charge became
apparent to Adams, he requested Cook on February 5, 1825, to put the
record of this conversation with Ingham, McDuffie, and Issacs on record,
because "all this would be history hereafter, and that those conversa-
tions would be an important part of history."11 Cook agreed, and on
February 25, gave his account of the meeting to Adams.12

One of the most interesting of Adams' statements of his moral
position with regard to political bargaining to gain election was an
article entitled "The Macbeth Policy." This article was written in
January, 1823,13 the same month in which Adams was nominated for the
presidency, and reads in part as follows:

An ingenious commentator upon Shakespear [sic] in a con-
versation by Moonlight on the Piazza observes that "The Macbeth
policy" — "If chance will have me king, why chance may crown
me," will not answer —

A friend who happens at the moment when this observation
is made, to join in the conversation, and who sometimes studies
the Tragedy of Macbeth, with a view to the first and highest
purposes of the Drama, to purify his own heart by the Passions
of Pity and Terror, enquires whether this quotation:

10 John Quincy Adams, "Miscellany," The Adams Papers, Part III,
(Boston, 1956), Microfilm reel number 256, January 21, 1825.
12 Ibid., February 25, 1825.
13 Bemis says Adams wrote "The Macbeth Policy" to Joseph Hop-
kins, whom Bemis refers to as "a distinguished Philadelphia lawyer and
member of the committee of foreign affairs in the House of Representa-
tives," (Bemis, op. cit., p. 19).
"If Chance will have me king, why chance may crown me without my stir."

can with propriety be denominated "The Macbeth Policy"? And whether it is not rather a remnant of Virtue yet struggling in the breast of that victim of unhallowed ambition, against the horrible imaginings of that policy by which he finally wins the Crown, and loses his life and his soul?

As a tail to this enquiry let us suppose that Macbeth had adhered to what you call his policy and waited for Chance to crown him. You say he never would have been king? True — and of course no Tragedy. The Macbeth policy is quite a different thing, and your quotation is an answer to your argument.

But in the application of the sentiment to present times and future events, ought we not to remark that kings and crowns and chance are all out of the question? Detur digniori is the inscription upon the prize, and the choice of ten millions of people by their delegated agents must award it.

"No" say you, "little is left to chance or merit, the prize is awarded by politicians and newspapers "and the man who sits down waiting for it by chance or just right, will go bare-headed all his life."

Here we come to the point — the principle of the Constitution in its purity is, that the duty shall be assigned to the most able and the most worthy — Politicians and newspapers may bestir themselves to point out who that is; and the only question between us, is, whether it be consistent with the duties of a citizen, who is supposed to desire that the choice should fall upon himself, to assist, countenance and encourage, those who are disposed to befriend him in the pursuit.

The Law of Friendship is a reciprocation of good offices — he who asks or accepts the offer, of friendly service, contracts the obligation of meeting it with a suitable return — He who asks or accepts the offer of aid to promote his own views of him from whom he received it: Whatever may be the wishes of an individual, nothing but the unbiased voice of many others can make him ever a Candidate for the chief magistracy. If he asks or accepts the aid of one, he must ask or accept the aid of multitudes. Between the principle of which much has been said the newspapers, that a President of the United States must remember those to whom he owes his election and the principle of accepting no aid on the score of friendship or personal kindness to him, there is no alternative. The former as it has been

11 "let it be given to the more worthy"
announced and urges, I deem to be essentially and vitally corrupt. The latter is the only principle to which no exception can be taken.¹⁵

Another insight into Adams' moral attitudes, in this case toward the function of a "diary" in a person's life, is revealed in a letter he wrote to his son, George Washington Adams, on November 28, 1827, in which he says:

A man who commits to paper from day to day the employment of his time, the places he frequents, the persons with whom he converses, the actions with which he is occupied, will have a perpetual guard over himself. His record is a second conscience. He will fly from worthless associates and from dishonest deeds, to avoid the alternative of becoming a self-accuser or of falsifying by the suppression of the truth (is) suggestion of the false."¹⁶ His own testimony to his own actions. I will appeal to yourself whether your interruptions in your diary, according as you have kept or neglected it have not been most frequently owing to a sense of shame, an unwillingness to put upon the record time worse than wasted, and actions of which you was ashamed."¹⁷

This statement of principle assumes some significance when the "gaps" in John Quincy Adams' own "diary" are taken into consideration.

Later historians, perhaps more sophisticated, have refused to accept Adams' protestations of morality at face value, maintaining instead that he not only was capable of entering into political negotiations to further his own cause, but that he did enter these negotiations fully aware of the moral implications of his actions. According to this point of view, there is much evidence that Adams dealt not only with Clay but


¹⁶"suppression of the truth (is) suggestion of the false"

¹⁷"Letterbook," op. cit., reel 146, November 28, 1827.
with many other political figures on the eve of the House election. The assumption follows, that if Adams was capable of dealing with these others, he was capable of dealing with Clay. The diaries and letters in the Adams papers reveal that John Quincy Adams held frequent and extended conversations with many political leaders during the period immediately preceding the election in the House of Representatives. The conversations which were recorded in these documents seem to indicate that Adams was soliciting the support of men in key states by giving them the impression that he was willing to grant them concessions of a political nature.

In order to win in the House, it was necessary for Adams to carry the votes of the six New England states, as well as Maryland, Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Louisiana, and New York. To do this, Adams had to obtain the votes of such westerners as John H. Scott of Missouri and D. P. Cook of Illinois, who alone would determine their state's votes; and in addition, the support of certain ex-Federalists, such as Daniel Webster and John Reed of Massachusetts, and Louis McLane of Delaware. The division in New York was so close that any weakening of the anti-Adams coalition in that state would probably give its vote to Adams.

We have seen how Adams maintained that he refused to solicit Cook's vote, in spite of its importance. The situation with regard to Scott of Missouri appears in a slightly different light, however. As early as December 11, Judge Nathaniel Pope had forwarded to Adams an analysis of Scott's character, and a discussion of the possibility of obtaining Scott's vote for Adams in case the election went to the
One week later Adams called on Monroe with letters recommending Scott's brother, Andrew, for appointment as Governor of Arkansas Territory. Monroe replied that the Attorney General had informed him that Andrew Scott should be removed from his office as judge in Arkansas because he had recently killed a colleague in a duel, and "could hardly therefore just at this time be appointed Governor of the Territory."

Soon after, Edward Wyer called on Adams to talk about Scott's hostility to Adams, and on January 10, Scott himself visited Adams to talk about the appointment of a governor of Arkansas, although Adams gives no indication of the conversation, except to say that Scott would call again. By the time Scott and Adams had their next recorded meeting, on January 21, Scott "gave [Adams] a list of the Printers whom he wished to have appointed for printing the Laws in Missouri ..." The tone of this letter requesting the appointments (which is not included in the Memoirs) is provocative in that it seems that Scott is telling Adams, rather than requesting Adams to make the appointments. Beginning "will you please to appoint as Public Printers in the State of Missouri ...

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18 "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 466, December 11, 1824.
19 "Rubbish," op. cit., reel 51, December 18, 1824. (Bemis identifies Wyer as "formerly consul at Riga during Adams's mission in Russia, and later in Hamburg, one time agent for claims in Santo Domingo, and occasional dispatch-bearer for the Department of State, seems to have been the Secretary of State's confidential leg-man about town." Bemis, op. cit., p. 24).
20 "Rubbish," op. cit., reel 51, December 31, 1824.
21 Ibid., January 10, 1825.
22 "Diary in Abridgement," op. cit., reel 36, January 21, 1825.
the following papers or persons . . . ," Scott then lists the three papers and their editors, with no mention of their qualifications or any other justification for their selection, in marked contrast to the contents and style of many other letters soliciting appointments that were received by Adams during this period. In his conversation with Adams, Scott explained that he had originally held some animosity towards Adams because he had several years before given government printing to a newspaper which was opposed to Scott. After Adams assured Scott that this appointment was purely unintentional, the matter of the proposed firing of Scott's brother was briefly discussed by the two men. Adams assured Scott that since the application for firing had been made the previous summer, and since no action had been taken on it, the matter would probably be dropped. Then the conversation turned to the approaching election, and Scott said that he had decided to vote with the other western delegations, and expressed the hope that Clay would be made a member of the next administration. Adams replied that "he would not expect me to enter upon details with regard to the formation of an administration, but that if I should be elected by the suffrages of the West, I should naturally look to the West for much of the support that I should need." Upon this remark, Scott "parted from [Adams] apparently satisfied." Scott must have thought over the propriety of the conversation with Adams, for the following day he called again "to say that he had

23"Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 467, January 21, 1825.
25Ibid.
been under some apprehension from what he had said yesterday, that I might consider him as having been disposed to prescribe conditions or make bargains." Adams assured him that he had not understood their talk in that sense. Scott then went on to say that he had not meant to speak positively, because he had not made up his mind as to how he should vote, except that he thought it best to act with his friends. Adams then wryly commended in the "Diary" that "this apprehension that he had spoken yesterday too positively is characteristic -- Scott means to vote with the strongest side." 26

Another important block of votes in the approaching House election was in the hands of the ex-Federalists, led by Daniel Webster. On December 14, William Plumer, Jr., of New Hampshire, called on Adams to report that Webster was "panting for the mission to London." 27 A month later Plumer repeated to Adams the fact of Webster's ambition to go as Minister to England. During this conversation, Adams observed that such ambition "might be gratified hereafter, but not immediately." 28 On January 21, John Reed came to talk to Adams "about Webster, Louis McLane, and the federalists," expressing Webster's apprehension that Adams would exclude the Federalists from office if elected. Adams assured Reed, however, that he "should exclude no person for political opinions, or for personal opposition" to him. 29

26 Ibid., January 22, 1825.
27 "Rubbish," op. cit., reel 51, December 14, 1824.
28 "Diary in Abridgement," op. cit., reel 36, January 17, 1825.
29 "Diary in Abridgement," op. cit., reel 36, January 21, 1825.
Adams became aware that the Kentuckian was "anxious for the conciliation of Webster and Louis McLane." Adams reported that he told Clay "the source of Webster's anxieties, and my own earnest desire to conciliate him, the manner in which my overtures had been received by him, and my own high opinion of his talents and capacities for service." Finally, on February 3, Webster himself called on Adams and spent the evening talking about the election. He read a letter to Adams from Henry R. Warfield, member of the House from Maryland, in which Warfield had asked Webster how to vote. Webster then showed Adams an answer in which Webster expressed the belief that Adams would not proscribe the Federalists, and instructed Warfield to vote for him, pointing out that Adams would confer "some one prominent appointment upon a person of that party." Adams objected to the last provision, saying that if it referred to the formation of an Administration, it would imply more than I could confirm." Webster, however, assured him that it did not, "but to the appointment perhaps of a judge." Adams then "approved altogether of the general spirit of his answer." Here we have evidence that Adams was beginning to feel that a little "immorality" might be acceptable -- a judge perhaps, but not a member of the cabinet! Upon departing, Webster remarked that Stephen Van Rensselaer, member of the House from New York, "entertained similar sentiments to his own, and by his advice would call on [Adams] at eleven o'clock," the following morning.

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30 Ibid., January 27, 1825.
31 Ibid., February 3, 1825.
32 Ibid.
When Van Rensselaer arrived, he spoke to Adams "much in the same manner as Webster had done," and Adams "answered him in the same manner, and as he said, entirely to his satisfaction." Van Rensselaer then turned the discussion to the sorry plight of one Solomon Van Rensselaer of Albany, New York, who was reported to be a "very ardent supporter" of Adams, but whose appointment as postmaster at Albany had been opposed by Van Buren. Adams assured Van Rensselaer that he "thought Van Buren had been wrong" in his opposition, because, although Van Buren was "a man of great talents and good principles," he "had suffered them to be too much warped by party spirit." This conversation might go further to explain Van Rensselaer's vote for Adams in the House election than the "heavenly sign" theory previously discussed.

Warfield, too, called on Adams. He told Adams that he had not yet decided whom to support in the coming election, but that he had been urged to vote for Jackson because it was being rumored that an Adams administration "would be conducted on the principle of proscribing the federal party." Adams assured Warfield, however, that he would never proscribe any party, and had "always done justice to the talents and services of the individuals composing" the Federalist party. Warfield then "declared himself perfectly satisfied" with this expression of Adams' sentiments.

In addition to these observations, which indicate that Adams entered into political negotiations at this time with the object of

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33 Ibid., February 4, 1825.
34 Ibid., February 7, 1825.
improving his position in the coming House election, there are numerous other brief exchanges appearing in the "Diary" and the letters of the period which substantiate this point of view. For example, Adams called on Van Buren, to tell him "that I believe the young man recommended by him for the appointment of Consul at Sant Tago of Chili, Daniel Wynne, would be nominated; but perhaps not till after the election in the House." And, in an earlier conversation with General Brown, Adams had exhibited a similar tendency, when Brown suggested that Adams might develop an understanding with Clinton, and expressed the desire that Clinton might enjoy a position in the next administration. On that occasion, Adams refused to tell Brown how he would form his administration in case he were elected, but assured the General that Clinton already knew of Adams' opinion of his talents, and that it was for Clinton to "determine how far it might be for his interest to maintain towards [Adams] the attitude of a competitor, or otherwise."36

During the period preceding the election in the House, Adams received much advice from well-wishers on how to succeed in politics. For example, James Tallmadge, then a member of the New York legislature, suggested a diplomatic appointment for Henry Wheaton, a New York

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35Ibid., February 1, 1825.


37Bemis identifies Tallmadge as having "gone back to the New York legislature after having made his one bright mark in history by introducing the amendment for restrictions of slavery in the proposed new state of Missouri." (Bemis, op. cit., p. 22).

38Bemis identifies Wheaton as a "youthful journalist and jurist of New York City, subsequently to win renown as a diplomat and international lawyer." (Bemis, op. cit., p. 22).
journalist and jurist, because Wheaton "has been useful, in our late struggles to sustain ourselves in this state." Tallmadge then went on to point out that Wheaton "ought to be sustained for further usefulness," and suggested a post in Brazil or Mexico. In another letter of this type, Peter Paul Francis Degrand urged Adams to try to cultivate political friends, pointing out how Adams had enraged L. W. Tazewell, Senator from Virginia, by arguing with him over the quality of wine at a dinner. "Thus, my dear sir, you see that you must look out," wrote Degrand, "even for your Tokay wine — the smallest and most insignificant shoal may shipwreck the ablest mariner, if he does not know of it -- but now I have pointed it out, it will be very easy to place Tazewell in the right channel, for swallowing his Tokay . . . his notions about Old States may be exceedingly useful just at this time The last phrase refers to an earlier remark by Tazewell that Virginia and New England should move together to spurn the idea of "impotent, half-civilized New States ruling over the Old Reputable States," And one "C. H. Warren," also

39 "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 466, December 21, 1824.

Bemis identifies Degrand as a "republican emigre of the French Revolution," and in a footnote on the same page, says Degrand detailed political trends and personalities in Massachusetts and New England in a numbered series of some 175 personal letters to John Quincy Adams between 1817 and 1825. Adams wrote him only half a dozen non-committal answers, and stopped replying to him when he realized what he was up to." (Bemis, op. cit., p. 22) Bemis, however, does not reveal what Degrand "was up to."

100 "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 466, December 27, 1824.

101 Ibid.

102 No identification of Warren could be discovered.
approached Adams to "urge his application for the appointment of collector at New Bedford, which he thinks is a case of life and death to the Republican party in that District." Even John Adams recommended "honest Spafford" for a job because "he has so much merit in his New York Gazetteer that I wish something could be done for him."

Adams' professed determination not to take political factors into consideration when making appointments was apparently forgotten in the period immediately following the election. On March 5, after extensively criticizing the system of rotation in office, he announced his refusal to appoint Thomas Hart Benton as Minister to Mexico because Benton had, "from being a furious personal and political enemy of Gen'l Jackson became about the time of this recommendation, a partizan not less ardent in his favour." And in the very next paragraph Adams announced his intention of appointing Rufus King as Minister to England (in spite of Adams' veiled promise to Webster), observing that among the reasons for King's selection was "the satisfaction which the appointment and his acceptance of it would give to the federal party throughout the Union."

All that these numerous instances of Adams' willingness to "bargain" to gain political advantage for himself may prove is that he was capable of entering into such negotiations, and not that he actually did negotiate with Clay. Only a direct examination of the evidence can

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14 Diaries in Abridgement, op. cit., reel 36, February 8, 1825.
15 Letters Received and other Loose Papers, op. cit., reel 468, March 2, 1825.
16 Diaries in Abridgement, op. cit., reel 36, March 5, 1825.
17 Ibid.
indicate whether such negotiating did take place, and whether they could be considered as designed to put Adams in the White House and Clay in the State Department.

On December 11, Adams received a letter from Joseph E. Sprague, who at the time was the Postmaster at Salem, Massachusetts, and "an aspirant for the collectorship of customs there." In the letter, Sprague sagely observed that in eight years both Jackson and Crawford would be too old for the presidency, but that Clay would not; and also that Clay could have much difficulty in following a western president because he was also from the west. He then advised Adams to cultivate Clay's friendship, because "his appointment to an important department by you" would secure his election later, and give Adams' administration the support of the West, also taking into account that Clay had "more friends among the Republicans of New England than any other candidate."

On the day preceding the receipt of the letter from Sprague, Adams had been paid a visit by Robert P. Letcher. No record of their conversation can be found in the "diary," but two days later, Adams returned the call. He reports that during this visit Letcher spoke to me much of the internal politics of Kentucky; of the convulsed interior of the state; on the question of breaking the Judges for pronouncing the Laws impairing the obligation of contracts; of the leading men in the state opposed to Mr. Clay, though professing to be his friends — of the sentiments of his own Constituents, upon the Presidential election; and their preference of a candidate next to Mr. Clay.

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\[48\] Bemis, op. cit., p. 22.

\[49\] "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 466, December 11, 1824.
He said it was rumoured also that the legislature would instruct the members from the State how to vote; but intimated that he should not consider himself bound by instructions from them.\textsuperscript{50}

Clay was present at this meeting, but limited his remarks to some observations on a grant to be given to General Lafayette.

Edward Wyer then called on Adams in his office in the State Department, and told him that "he had it from good authority that Mr. Clay was much disposed to support me if he could at the same time be useful to himself."\textsuperscript{51} That evening Clay and Adams "had conversation at dinner,"\textsuperscript{52} but Adams did not record the topic of the talk. Wyer repeated the story again the following day — that Clay would support Adams in return for support for himself, but when Adams asked him for the source of his information, Wyer "could not give Adams his author."\textsuperscript{53}

At this point Robert Letcher returned again to see Adams, "ostensibly with a claim . . . but his apparent main object was to talk about the presidential election." Of this visit, Adams observed:

Mr. Letcher is an intimate friend of Mr. Clay\textsuperscript{1} and lodges at the same house with him. He expects that after the result is known that Mr. Clay cannot be voted for in the house, there will be meetings of the people in the several counties, instructing their members to vote for Jackson; and perhaps that similar instructions will be sent on by their legislature . . . Letcher is evidently alarmed at this, and in the midst of

\textsuperscript{50}"Rubbish," \textit{op. cit.}, reel 51, December 12, 1824.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., December 15, 1824.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., December 16, 1824. Also on December 16, news was received at Washington that Louisiana had gone for Jackson — that Clay would therefore be excluded from the list of three candidates which would go before the House of Representatives for final selection.
strong professions of independence, and of indifference about retaining his seat, is plainly not prepared to act definitively in opposition to the will of his constituents — He intimated that . . . of the Kentucky delegation here, a large portion were warmly attached to him Clay — that lately speaking of what might ensue here, he had expressed the wish to go in harmony with his friends; which Letcher said he interpreted as a wish that his friends would go in harmony with him . . . Letcher wished to know what my sentiments towards Clay were; and I told him without disguise that I harboured no hostility against him — that whatever of difference there had been between us had arisen altogether from him and not from me. . . . Letcher said . . . he was sure Clay felt now no hostility to me. He had spoken respectfully of me, and was a man of sincerity . . . the drift of all Letcher’s discourse was much the same as Wyer had told me, that Clay would willingly support me, if he could thereby serve himself, and the substance of his meaning was that if Clay’s friends could know that he would have a prominent share in the Administration, that might induce them to vote for me, even in the face of Instructions . . . but Letcher did not profess to have any authority from Clay for what he said, and he made no definite proposition. He spoke of his interview with me as altogether confidential, and in my answers to him I spoke in mere general terms. . . .

Still another meeting between the two men was not recorded by Adams; but on December 23, they had a conversation:

upon the subject which he broached the other day . . . the object of Letcher appeared to me to be, to convince me of the importance of obtaining an Election in the House of Representatives, at the first ballot; and that it would be obtainable; by securing the votes of the states of Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Louisiana — I told him candidly that however desirable this might be, it would be utterly impracticable; and that I had no expectation of receiving the vote of his own State of Kentucky — he seemed anxious to convince me that I might receive it, and enumerated the whole delegation, stating how each of them was now disposed — a majority of them being uncommitted — I consider Letcher as moving for Mr. Clay; and this anxiety of a friend of Clay’s that I should obtain the election at the first ballot in the House is among the whimsical results of political combination at this time. "Incedo super ignes."55

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54 Ibid., December 17, 1824.
55 Ibid., December 23, 1824. The literal translation of the Latin quotation is "I walk over fires."
Several times more they conferred. Letcher again expressed confidence that Adams would get the vote of Kentucky in the House of Representatives, "though he expected instructions from the Legislature of the State to vote for Jackson."\(^{56}\)

On January 1, 1825, Letcher informed Adams that:

the members of the Kentucky Legislature would in their private capacities and not by Legislative act, recommend to the members from the State in the House to vote for General Jackson as President, and popular meetings to pass similar resolutions had been and would be got up --- but I [Adams] might rely upon it they would have no effect. The vote of Kentucky in the House was fixed and unalterable ... He spoke of the difference between Mr. Clay and me as giving concern to some of the members of the delegation, and intimated a wish that I should have some conversation with Mr. Clay, upon the subject. I told him I would very readily, and whenever it might suit the convenience of Mr. Clay.\(^{57}\)

That evening, when Adams attended a dinner given by Congress in honor of General Lafayette, Clay told him that he wanted to have "some confidential conversations upon public affairs" with Adams, who replied that he "would be happy . . . whenever it might suit . . . [Clay's] convenience."\(^{58}\)

In the "Diary" immediately following the above notation, Adams has the following inscription: "At the beginning of this year, there is in my prospects and anticipations a solemnity, and moment, never before experienced; and to which unaided nature is inadequate."\(^{59}\) Did Adams expect Clay to "aid nature" in the way he had foreseen in "The Macbeth Policy?"

\(^{56}\)Ibid., December 29, 1824.

\(^{57}\)Diary," op. cit., reel 39, January 1, 1825.

\(^{58}\)Ibid.

\(^{59}\)Ibid.
Before the projected meeting between Clay and Adams had taken place, George Robertson, a former member of the House from Kentucky, and at the time a member of the legislature from that State, wrote Adams a letter, dated January 6 and delivered to Adams on January 21 by Letcher. The letter stated that the Kentucky legislature had decided to advise their congressional delegation to vote for Jackson. Robertson analyzed some of the reasons for the decision, referring to the leaders of the movement as "office-hunters," and saying that they were supporting Jackson in anticipation of political reward. After observing that "men who will regulate public sentiment" in Kentucky were against Jackson, and that the vote had been intended to "humble and paralyze" Clay, Robertson advised Adams that he could still get the support of Kentucky and win.

If all things be managed discreetly and judiciously ... all depends on yourself. I know you may succeed. And if I were in the Arena would [ensure?] the vote of my state. I know how it could be done. If you loose thy fear they will loose Ohio. Mr. Letcher is my friend and confidant — he is disposed to be yours — there is no man in whom you can confide with more safety. You may communicate with him fully and unreservedly on any subject connect with the great object — more so than any one man ... he is remarkable for his discretion and his good common sense — he understands men as well as any one of his age ... He may be able to render you service — and I assure you that there will be not the remotest hazard in making of him the depository of your feelings and views in relation to the Presidency — you will know how to appreciate my brashness. The occasion will not allow a ... disguise — I am extremely desirous for your success — and cannot conveniently, with my opinion of duty, omit anything in my power which may lend, in any degree, to promote the object ... 

60 "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 467, January 6, 1825.
On January 9 Henry Clay visited Adams at home, and spent the evening in "a long conversation explanatory of the past and prospective of the future." According to Adams' "Diary":

Clay said that the time was drawing near when the choice must be made in the House of Representatives of a President from the three candidates presented by the electoral colleges. That... the time had now come, at which he might be explicit in his communication with me, and he had for that purpose asked this confidential interview — He wished me as far as I might think proper to satisfy him with regard to some principles of great public importance, but without any personal considerations for himself — in the question to come before the House, between General Jackson, Mr. Crawford and myself, he had no hesitation in saying that his preference would be for me.

Clay announced his intention of supporting Adams on January 2U. The announcement resulted in "a very high state of excitement in the House." With Clay and "the majority of the Ohio and Kentucky delegations having yesterday unequivocally avowing" their determination to vote for Adams, "the impression almost universal... was that the election was settled" in Adams' favor. Adams, however, anticipated the ordeal that now awaited him, and in his "diary" for January 25, he observed: "my situation will be difficult and trying beyond my powers of expression — may but my strength be proportioned to my trials." Both Letcher and Clay expressed a wish for another meeting with Adams, and set January 28 as the date. Adams waited all evening at

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61 Diary, op. cit., reel 39, January 1, 1825. Here the "diary" entry for that day breaks off in the middle of the page, to resume again (in that particular volume) on Wednesday, June 26, 1825.
62 Diary in Abridgement, op. cit., reel 36, January 24, 1825.
63 Ibid., January 25, 1825.
64 Ibid., January 27, 1825.
home alone, expecting Clay to call, but he failed to appear. The follow­ing evening, however, Clay accompanied Adams home after a dinner at George Sullivan's, and the two spent a two-hour visit discussing "all the prospects and probabilities of the Presidential election." Adams reported that Clay's

spoke . . . with the utmost freedom of men and things. [He] intimated doubts and prepossessions concerning individual friends of mine, to all which I listened with due consideration. He was anxious for the conciliation of Webster and Louis McLane, and expressed some jealousy as from Webster, of the persons by whom he supposed me to be surrounded . . . his own situation is difficult and critical. He is attacked with fury in the newspapers for having come out for me, and threats of violence have been largely thrown out by the partizans of General Jackson. . . . this blustering has an air of despara­tion — but we must meet it.66

After Clay's announcement that he intended to support Adams, both men were subjected to warnings and criticisms. In one letter from an anonymous "friend" in Philadelphia, Adams was warned that Clay's support of Adams would result in a civil war at worst, and four years of misery for Adams at best, stressing that Adams could succeed Jackson in four years if he supported the "Old Hero" now.67 And Edward Patchell68 appealed to Adams to step down rather than to "crawl into the Presi-dential chair through the base intrigue of corrupt politicians."69

65Ibid., January 28, 1825.
66Ibid., January 29, 1825.
67"Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 467, January 27, 1825.
69"Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 467, January 27, 1825.
George Kremer's letter charging Clay and Adams with a "corrupt bargain" appeared in the *Columbian Observer*, as well as Clay's card challenging Kremer, which appeared in the *National Intelligencer*. On February 3, Clay "called upon the House to institute an investigation. Kremer did the same, and a debate ensued upon it in the House."  

By this time, the seriousness of the political situation was becoming increasingly apparent to Adams. He suddenly decided that he did not want the presidency after all. In his "diary" for February 2, he remarked:

To me the alternatives are both distressing in prospect, and the most formidable is that of success. All the danger is on the pinnacle. The humiliation of failure will be so much more than compensated by the safety in which it will leave me, that I ought to regard it as a consummation devoutly to be wished and hoped to find consolation in it.  

As the pressure began to build up in the wake of the "corrupt bargain" accusation, Adams seemed also to have been desperately trying to convince people that he had not and would not bargain. He requested Daniel P. Cook to put in writing the "corrupt offer" Ingham and McDuffie had made him. And he delivered to James Monroe a letter "upon the subject of nominations to the foreign missions; and told him that [he] wished to put it as a deposit in his hands, for a testimonial that [he] had not used those missions to promote any purpose of his own."

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70 The original card written by Clay is included in the Adams papers with a note from Charles Francis Adams explaining that the original card came from the papers of "Mr. Seaton, of Boston." (Ibid., January 31, 1825.)

71 "Diary in Abridgement," op. cit., reel 36, February 3, 1825.

72 Ibid., February 2, 1825.
Monroe accepted the letter, said he would not communicate it to any one, and remarked that he was aware of the extreme circumspection with which it was necessary for Adams to act.\textsuperscript{73}

Monroe had apparently decided to make the nominations for foreign missions on January 31. When Adams was advised of this fact by George Sullivan, he immediately went to Monroe and found Calhoun and Secretary of the Navy Samuel L. Southard with him. After Calhoun and Southard left, Monroe told Adams that he intended to make the appointments at once, upon the advice of Calhoun and Southard. Adams said that he would be willing to have Monroe make the nominations at once also, but that in the face of the approaching election, such a step would "increase the excitement already great and every day flaming." Adams reasoned that Calhoun and Southard had urged Monroe to make the nominations immediately to keep Adams from using them as lures to promote his own election in the House.\textsuperscript{74} On the following day, February 1, Adams again called on Monroe, who announced that he had decided not to make the nominations after all, but rather to leave them to his successor. Adams, in his "Diary," attributed Monroe's decision to the influence of Ingham, who had visited Monroe that morning.\textsuperscript{75} But Adams needed further assurance, and returned the next morning to ask Monroe to verify his decision of the previous day. When Monroe confirmed this, Adams said that he had originally understood that Monroe had been considering the alternatives.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., February 4, 1825.
\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., January 31, 1825.
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., February 1, 1825.
of making the appointments before or after the House election, not of leaving them to his successor. Adams then informed Monroe that he wished him to make the nominations before the election, rather than not at all, because by doing so he would keep the rumor from circulating that the posts were being held out as rewards for political support. Adams observed that among the candidates that [Monroe] had mentioned to me, were two members of Congress, one holding, the other supposed to influence votes -- it would be difficult for the successor to nominate either of them, especially if the votes in question should be for him. Then, when Adams called on Monroe on February 4 with the letter certifying that he did not want to use the offices for political purposes, Monroe explained his own position by pointing out that he had decided not to make the nominations at all, but to leave them to his successor, because "that operating equally upon both could not be attributed to the influence of either." The evidence is overwhelming that Adams feared falling into the political maelstrom created by the "corrupt bargain" charge. He asked George Sullivan if he would be willing to "testify . . . in a court of justice" with regard to a conversation with Calhoun, in which Calhoun made the remark that if Clay were appointed Secretary of State by Adams a determined opposition to the administration would be immediately organized under the banner of General Jackson. General Brown certainly

76 Ibid., February 2, 1825.
77 Ibid., February 4, 1825.
78 Ibid., February 11, 1825.
realized the seriousness of the charge when he pleaded with Adams not to appoint Clay as Secretary of State.⁷⁹ And Robert Walsh, editor of the Philadelphia National Gazette, in a letter of February 17 to Alexander N. Everett,⁸⁰ observed that "with regard to Clay, I do not think that he can accept now, of any appointment after all the noises made about bargains."⁸¹ Finally, James Gallatin, son of former Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin, explained to Adams why his father could not take the same post in Adams' administration. Young Gallatin reasoned that his father refused the post because if he had accepted it "he would have been subjected to the same surmises, to which Mr. Clay has been, by the circumstances of that gentleman's accepting one of the departments."⁸²

On February 10, Adams first told Southard that he would appoint Clay as Secretary of State.⁸³ The following day Adams informed Monroe that the reason for the appointment was Clay's "talents and services ... to the western section of the Union, whence he comes, and to the confidence in me, manifested by their delegations."⁸⁴

In contrast to the apprehensive Adams, Clay "made light of the

⁷⁹Ibid., February 12, 1825.
⁸⁰Bemis identifies Everett as "Adams's friend and protege ... of Boston, brother to Edward Everett [later] minister to Spain ... later to become brother-in-law to the President [Adams's] daughter-in-law, Abigail Brooks Adams, wife of Charles Francis Adams." (Bemis, op. cit., p. 22).
⁸¹"Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 467, February 17, 1825.
⁸²Ibid., March 2, 1825.
⁸⁴Ibid., February 11, 1825.
threatened opposition, and thought all the projects of that nature which have been announced were mere ebullitions of disappointment at the issue of the election, which would soon be abandoned." Clay then went on to add that had the investigation of the "bargain" charge gone to the House, he, Clay, could have proved that a conspiracy had existed against him. Clay then claimed that Kremer had even been willing to sign an apology to Clay — until Ingham, McDuffie, and James Buchanan had convinced him not to do so. And in another meeting with Adams on February 27, Clay again predicted that the attempts of Ingham and McDuffie to use Kremer would backfire, and stated that he had been approached by Jackson's and Crawford's backers also, with offers of "bargains." Clay seemed confident that there would be no opposition to his nomination in the Senate, or at most, only token opposition.

When the list of nominations suggested by Adams was presented to the Senate on March 7, all were approved without opposition, except for Clay's, to which there were several "nays," including Jackson's. But where the master politician, Henry Clay, had underestimated the strength and importance of such token opposition, the naive Puritan, John Quincy Adams, realized its true significance. He remarked in his "diary" that "this was the first act of the opposition from the stump which is to be carried on against the Administration under the banners of General Jackson."
Such is the evidence in the Adams manuscripts which throws light on the "corrupt bargain" controversy. How far does this evidence go in answering the three critical questions which were posed at the beginning of the chapter?

The first and oldest historical interpretation indicated that Adams was a moralistic Puritan, one of the last of the old school of Revolutionary statesmen, who was not even capable of campaigning in the modern demagogic manner then coming into fashion, not to mention entering into "corrupt" negotiations with Clay to further his own political interests. According to this view, this upright statesman was led by his own honesty and political naivete to commit a blunder which allowed him to be placed at the mercy of the slanderous pro-Jackson and pro-Crawford demagogues in the greatest political "frame-up" in American history, and one which eventually destroyed his and Clay's political fortunes.

As this thesis proves, however, in spite of Adams' repeated protestations of innocence, he was not only capable of, but did actively engage in, political negotiations with various political figures in key positions in the period preceding the House election. The extended conversations with Scott of Missouri and the ex-Federalists led by Webster, corroborates this fact beyond a shadow of doubt. True, Adams was apparently a religious and moral man, undoubtedly more moral than the typical political figure in that era of growing "democracy." Still, he was by training a diplomat as much as a moralistic Puritan, and this facet of his character came to the fore in 1824 and 1825.

Nor, after examining the Adams papers, can this writer conclude that Adams was as naive as "traditional" historians claim. The letters
from Tallmadge, Degrand, Warren, and especially Robertson of Kentucky, advising Adams to trust Letcher, would have been torn up in righteous indignation by anyone as moral as the traditionalist historians have pictured Adams. Adams knew what he was doing, as the "Incedo super ignes" entry in his "diary" for December 23 indicates. Indeed, Adams was apparently more aware of the political whirlwind which he was brewing than was Clay, who until the end kept predicting that the threatened opposition would never materialize.

It is revealing to notice how Adams desperately tried to convince not only his contemporaries but posterity that he was an honest man -- by requesting Cook's statement for history; by presenting the letter to Monroe certifying that he was not using the foreign appointments for political gain; and by telling George Sullivan that he would expect him to be willing to testify that the Calhounites were planning to wreck Adams' administration by planned opposition. As the pressure from the "bargain" charge began to build up, Adams' entries in the "Diary" become more and more guarded. Finally, any doubt that Adams knew what he was doing can be dispelled by a careful reading of the "Macbeth Policy," in which Adams clearly reveals the alternatives facing the presidential hopeful who is contemplating cultivating political "friendships."

The second historical view, in which Adams is seen as the moralist whose code gradually breaks down in the face of political ambition, would seem to be the most accurate, when the evidence in the Adams manuscripts is considered. His avowed determination not to "bargain," stated so dogmatically in "The Macbeth Policy," in January, 1823, had by
late 1824 been modified to the point where Adams was willing to enter into extended negotiations with Scott, Cook, Letcher, Van Rensselaer, and other members of the House with the obvious objective of gaining their support in the approaching elections by making concessions of a political nature. And by February, 1825, Adams' previous position had been altered to the point where he was willing to promise the appointment of a judge (if not a cabinet member) to gain the support of the ex-Federalists. This gradual process of "moral evolution" continued until it was dramatically reversed by the "corrupt bargain" charge, in the face of which Adams suddenly becomes the righteous statesman once again, whose composure is only slightly weakened by his demands that people sign affidavits certifying that he is indeed honest. Perhaps the very moral attitude that Adams throughout his entire administration (and which is used by "traditional" historians to prove his moral character), can be explained by the fact that the only time he let his conscience slip he suffered for it, and so determined to keep to the "moral" path from that time forward.

The final question posed is the practical and realistic one — did Adams and Clay reach an agreement which led to Clay's support of Adams in the House election and Clay's subsequent appointment as Secretary of State? There are obvious gaps in the Adams papers in the areas which contain information pertaining to this question. The very fact that these gaps exist in the "Diaries" and correspondence might indicate that Adams was trying to hide something; but it is very difficult to prove guilt because of these omissions. Probably the

closest thing to a direct admission by Adams that a "corrupt bargain" did exist can be found in the entry in his "Diary" for February 11, 1825. Here Adams recorded having notified Monroe that the reason he appointed Clay was because of Clay's "talents and services -- to the western section of the Union, whence he comes, and to the confidence in me manifested by their delegations." In other words, Adams says that he appointed Clay because Clay's western friends in the House voted for him. Nowhere in the Adams Papers is there evidence that Adams told Clay before the election that he would be appointed Secretary of State because of this support, although another entry in the "Diary" indicates that he hinted as much to John Scott. In a conversation with Scott, when asked whether Clay would be made a member of the new administration, Adams replied: "If I should be elected by the suffrages of the West, I should naturally look to the West for much of the support that I should need." The statement satisfied Scott, but not later historians.

An examination of the role played by Adams in the election of 1824 reveals an unfolding drama that in many respects resembles the "tragedy" predicted by Adams himself two years previously in the "Macbeth Policy." Adams, not Monroe, was the last of the great statesmen trained in the ideals of the Revolutionary period. Unlike the others, he lived on into a different era, into the period of the "rise of the common man," when mere excellence did not assure political favor, when "courting the masses" became the essential ingredient for political success. Adams

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89 "Diary in Abridgement," F. cit., reel 36, February 11, 1825.
90 Ibid., January 21, 1825.
could not lower himself to enter the political arena and utilize the tactics of the common demagogue; the closest he could come was to enter a "bargain" with Clay which seems harmless when measured by the standards of political conduct of a later era.
Close and careful analysis of John Quincy Adams' "Diary" in its original form on Microfilm is made very difficult by the disordered condition of the original. Adams kept not one but three "Diaries" much of the time: a short "Line-a-day Diary," a longer "Diary," and finally, a "Diary in Abridgement," which, instead of being "abridged," is actually much longer in many entries than the other two.

Taking into consideration only the period from December 1, 1824 (after the electors had been selected, but before they had voted), to March 4, 1825 (the date Adams was inaugurated), we find fragments of the "Diary" appearing in at least five separate volumes. The entries for December 1 through January 14 are entered in a volume entitled "Rubbish," which also includes much unrelated miscellaneous material; the entries for January 1 through January 9 are included in the short "Line-a-day Diary," as well as in the regular "Diary" in a separate volume. From January 15 through February 16, the entries are in the "Diary in Abridgement," but the "Line-a-day Diary" includes entries for this period also. There is a complete gap in both the "Diary in Abridgement" and the short "Diary" for the period beginning February 17 and ending February 21 -- for this period the observer must seek information in the "Line-a-day Diary." The "Diary in Abridgement" resumes with the February 21 entry, and continues through the inauguration.
John Quincy Adams himself, in a "pocket memorandum book," lists the "Diaries" which together comprise the "Diary" of Charles Francis Adams' Memoirs. In this list, John Quincy lists ten separate volumes and one "small, leather-covered book" as including the "Diary" entries from June 3, 1794 to June 25, 1828. Considering only the period under discussion in this paper, we find that he indicates that entries up to February 16, 1825 are in "Vol. 9," and entries for January 1 through January 9 are included in "Vol. 10." Whether the "Line-a-day" entries are included in this account is not indicated.

While the correspondence and miscellaneous material in the other Adams Papers has been arranged for the most part in chronological order, which makes it much easier to examine than the "Diaries," there are still problems encountered. For example, the statement from Daniel P. Cook pertaining to his conversation with Ingham, McDuffie, and Issacs appears unsigned and dated "January 21, 1825" in the Adams Papers. The date on the statement discusses, not the date it was written. Another dating problem presents itself in the "Diary in Abridgement." This journal was obviously written sometime after the events it describes took place; yet the dates of the events depicted, and not the dates when the events took place appear in it.

As has been previously mentioned, there seems to be very little

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92 "Miscellany," op. cit., reel number 256. The statement also appears in reel number 467 (Letters Received and other Loose Papers,) with the name "D. P. Cook" dubbed in and "Cook, D. P. 21 Jan 1825" written at the top of the third page in what appears to be John Quincy Adams' handwriting.
evidence of bias in the Memoirs for the period under consideration. Anything detrimental to the Adams interests seems to be faithfully included in the text, with the only changes made apparently to eliminate "unimportant" information (such as the lists of the guests at dinner parties and the names of the plays attended by Adams), or to modernize spelling and punctuation to make the material more readable. The only changes in wording that might also result in changes in meaning occur in the Memoirs for January 9 and 29, 1825. In the former entry, Adams reported that Clay said Adams' friends had appealed to Clay repeatedly to support their candidate, "directly or indirectly urging considerations personal to himself as motives to his cause ... ." In the original document, there seems to be little doubt that the word "cause" was really "course." And in the latter entry, Adams, in another conversation with Clay is reported in the Memoirs as having told Clay of "the sources of Webster's anxieties, and my own earnest desire to conciliate him." The word "sources" in the original is written "source."

As we have seen, Samuel Flagg Bemis attaches a great deal of importance to the gap which appears in the original "Diary" following Adams' description of his crucial talk with Clay on January 9. And it is at this gap in the Memoirs where Charles Francis Adams inserted

96 "Diary in Abridgement," op. cit., p. 40.
97 Bemis, op. cit., p. 40.
his celebrated footnote to explain why the entry for that day had not been completed:

This appears to have been intended for a full report, which the extreme pressure of business and visits subsequently prevented the writer from completing. Long lists of persona calling daily, with their respective wishes, still remain, but they scarcely retain interest enough to merit the space they would occupy in these pages. 98

Charles Francis has failed to mention, however, that these "long lists of persona calling" are not included in the same volume as the January 9 entry. And neither does he try to explain why the "Diary in Abridgement," (which had to be written later, when the "pressure of business and visits" lessened), begins with the entry for January 15, and not January 9.

Examination of the original volumes which make up the "Diary" of the Memoirs for this critical date reveals that the gap of January 9 is merely one of several similar gaps that appear from time to time during the period. Indeed, this gap is not a gap at all in the "Line-a-day Diary," 99 and the "Rubbish" volume. 100 A much more significant gap, from length of omission, at least, is found between February 17 and February 21, when the only record is found in the "Line-a-day Diary." 101 Thus it would seem that any attempt to reconstruct what occurred during this critical juncture in American history by what does not appear in these manuscripts rather than by what does appear would seem to be a difficult undertaking. The gaps which assume so much significance in the

99 "Diary," op. cit., reel 26, January 9, 1825.
100 "Rubbish," op. cit., reel 51, January 9, 1825.
101 "Diary," op. cit., reel 26, February 17, 1825.
accounts of some contemporary historians do not appear to be so unnatural in the original context as they seem in the Memoirs.

To further complicate an already complex situation, the Memoirs have gaps where none exist in the manuscripts. For example, in the period under discussion, material is omitted from the entries in the Memoirs for December 18, January 1, January 9, January 10, January 22, February 8, February 21, and February 22. There seems to be little reason for these omissions in the Memoirs, other than that Charles Francis Adams apparently felt this material to be of so little historical importance that its inclusion could not be justified. Most of these omissions are just a few words in length. The exceptions are seventy-six lines which were cut from the December 18 entry in the original "Diary,"102 and entries for January 10,103 February 21, and February 22,104 which are not in the Memoirs, although they appear in the original manuscripts.

Perhaps the most interesting document in the whole collection to those historians who prefer to "read between the lines" of the Adams Papers is the previously-mentioned letter of December 10, 1838, in which Albert H. Tracy asked John Quincy Adams to clarify some of the events which took place in December, 1824 and January, 1825. Adams apparently never answered the letter,105 perhaps because Tracy's stated objective

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102"Rubbish," op. cit., reel 51, December 18, 1824.
103Ibid., January 10, 1825.
104"Diary in Abridgement," op. cit., reel 36, February 16, 1825.
105Bemis, op. cit., p. 40.
in asking the questions was to obtain answers which would serve as "a gratifying memorial to posterity." In the letter, Tracy asked:

Another matter which I shall be happy for you to verify is the conversation had with you by Mr. Clay at his first interview when he announced his determination to support your election. It occurred at your house, where I happened to come the moment Mr. Clay left, and you then repeated to me, with verbal accuracy I have no doubt, what had just passed between you.  

This is the same Tracy, who, upon the day of the Adams-Clay meeting, was "speculating upon the approaching election... without conclusive materials for judgement," but whose speculations, while "less flattering," were "generally more correct than those of most others" who discussed the then-approaching election with Adams.

Apparently Tracy was speculating 14 years later, still "without conclusive materials for judgement," just as are so many American historians.

106 "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," op. cit., reel 510, December 10, 1838.


108 Ibid., January 2, 1825.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Documents

(The fundamental primary source used in the preparation of this thesis, particularly the last chapter, was the Microfilm edition of The Adams Papers which is on file at the Montana State University Library. The original manuscripts are owned by and in the custody of the Massachusetts Historical Society. In 1905, the Adams Manuscript Trust was instituted by the three surviving grandsons of John Quincy Adams "to provide for the proper care and use of all the papers, public and private," of the Adams family. The Papers were deposited with the Society upon establishment of the Trust, and in 1953, at the request of the Trustees, the Society undertook the microfilming of the Papers "for the benefit of scholarship and the better understanding of history." In April, 1956, ultimate custody and ownership of the Papers was given to the Society.)


Books


Morse, John T. *John Adams.* Boston: 1897.


Periodicals


Unpublished Material