

was making itself felt; notably in the loss of the "great commoner's majority in the House of Commons. The policy that followed, lacking the sagacity of that of Pitt, possessed neither the vigor which had made possible the "world power" of Great Britain, nor the liberality which could make it lasting. Now began the usurious treatment of the colonies which resulted in the Declaration of Independence.

Unaided, three million people thinly scattered along the Atlantic Coast from New England to Florida, never hoped to successfully cope with the power of the "mother country." To France the Colonies must look for aid. Accordingly, the Continental Congress appointed as Commissioners to that country Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane and Arthur Lee.

Dr. Franklin took passage in the sloop-of-war "Reprisal," October 26, 1776, and arrived in Paris on the 21st of December of that year. He shortly after rented a comfortable house in Passy—a village near Paris—where he lived during nine memorable years.

Franklin was now ready to begin his work, and it remained to be seen whether he possessed the power to persuade the French—broken as they were in resources—that now, by aiding the Colonies, could be struck the blow that would break the menacing power of Great Britain. In the meantime his countrymen hoped and fought.

That the United States in this crisis of her history had one such a man to send upon this difficult diplomatic mission was indeed fortunate. It is extremely doubtful if any other available person could have filled his place. It is noticeable that further on so able a patriot as John Adams was scarce in France before he caused upon the part of the French Government chafing which was only relieved by the persuasive wisdom of Frank-

lin. The French historian quoted by Sparks says: "Courtiers were struck with his native dignity, and discovered in him the profound statesman. They personified in him the Republic of which he was a representative. Men imagined they saw in him a sage of antiquity come back to give austere lessons and generous example to the moderns. His virtues and his renown negotiated for him, and before the second year of his mission no one conceived it possible to refuse fleets and an army to the compatriots of Franklin."

When Franklin first reached France he received an audience from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vergennes, who requested an exact statement of the condition of affairs in the United States. This was prepared and presented, but no immediate reply was made to it, although the French people were almost unanimous in the desire to aid the American cause, and did covertly aid it. Nearly a year elapsed from the time of Franklin's arrival before the French Government manifested any desire to give open aid and recognition to the Colonies. The king had always shown great impatience when the subject was brought before his notice, and behind the "dull reluctance" of Louis XVI. who may say what forebodings of bankruptcy and revolution may have disquieted! But at length, on December 4, 1777, a packet arrived with the stirring tidings of the surrender of Burgoyne. The arguments of Franklin were now supplemented by the proven fact that the Colonies would not be but weak and helpless allies. France no longer hesitated. A treaty in which reciprocity was the controlling idea was at once concluded.

The alarm of England at the success of Franklin was clearly shown by her secretly sending agents with offers of peace more advantageous than any she had as yet offered. These were mercilessly ridiculed by Franklin.