

14 JEFFERSON AND HIS COLLEAGUES

he begged Mrs. Dolly Madison to act as hostess; and a charming and gracious figure she was, casting a certain extenuating veil over the President's gaucheries. Jefferson held, with his many political heresies, certain theories of social intercourse which ran rudely counter to the prevailing etiquette of foreign courts. Among the rules which he devised for his republican court, the precedence due to rank was conspicuously absent, because he held that "all persons when brought together in society are perfectly equal, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office." One of these rules to which the Cabinet gravely subscribed read as follows:

To maintain the principles of equality, or of *pêle môle*, and prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy, the members of the Executive will practise at their own houses, and recommend an adherence to the ancient usage of the country, of gentlemen in mass giving precedence to the ladies in mass, in passing from one apartment where they are assembled into another.

The application of this rule on one occasion gave rise to an incident which convulsed Washington society. President Jefferson had invited to dinner the new British Minister Merry and his wife, the Spanish Minister Yrujo and his wife, the French