

**A VINDICATION OF
EDMUND RANDOLPH,
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF,
AND PUBLISHED IN 1795**

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A Vindication of Edmund Randolph, Written by Himself, and Published in 1795 by P. V. Daniel Jr. & Edmund Randolph

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P. V. DANIEL JR. & EDMUND RANDOLPH

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EDMUND RANDOLPH,

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NEW EDITION,

WITH A PREFACE,

BY P. V. DANIEL, JR.

RICHMOND:
CHARLES H. WYNNE, PRINTER.
1855.

Hon. George Bancroft:
with the respects of
The Editors.



EDITOR'S PREFACE.

In re-producing the "Vindication" of EDMUND RANDOLPH, originally published by him now sixty years since, a brief exposition of the circumstances and reasons, which seem to call for its re-publication, will not be inappropriate; nor, it is hoped, uninteresting.

To purify the current of our country's history from the turbid obscurity, which the violence of party spirit imparted to its early course; to free it from the stain of having even its earliest counsels guided, not by the patriots whom we revere, but by corrupt and selfish men; and, at the same time, to repel the only aspersion, with which even calumny ever dared to assail the character of one, whose virtues and talents, devoted to his country's service, made him a bright exemplar for the generous youth of succeeding generations; these, surely, are objects, from which no patriot can turn with indifference, nor withhold his aid, however feeble.

The true history of the transactions to which these pages relate, presents a case, to which, perhaps, the records of no civilized country—certainly not those of our own—afford a parallel. Let its few and simple facts be stated: no comment could place its enormity in a stronger light. Edmund Randolph, born of eminent and wealthy parents, of commanding talents and attainments, disinherited by his father for his patriotic devotion to his country in her Revolutionary struggle for independence, beloved and respected by all who knew him, honored by his native State, (and that State was VIRGINIA—the Virginia of 1776,) for his virtues and services, by calling him to the chief magistracy, even before Patrick Henry, who succeeded him—by delegating him to the Congress who framed the Federal Constitution, and by adopting that Constitution partly at least through his advocacy, opposed to the impassioned eloquence of Henry himself; at the organization of the Federal Government urgently invited by Washington to become a member of his first Cabinet; continuing, first as Attorney General, and then as Secretary of State, for more than six years, on terms of the closest intimacy and confidence, and in daily and almost hourly communication, with Washington, for whom his respect scarcely exceeded his affection;—THIS MAN, in the laborious discharge of his official duties to his country, in the unsuspecting assurance of the confidence of the President, who masked his own suspicions with more than accustomed cordiality, that he might the better watch the conduct of his *friend*;—THIS MAN is suddenly stricken down, condemned,

and disgraced, so far as such a man can be disgraced—and for what cause, and on what evidence of guilt or unworthiness? Who was his accuser? who the witnesses? and what the facts corroborating their evidence, adduced against him? Let them be fairly and fully stated. A Minister from the French Republic, chagrined and out of humor at the failure of his mission, and yet evidently anxious to create in the minds of his government an exaggerated estimate of his insight into the secret springs of American politics, and of his influence over American statesmen, in transmitting to that government *secret* dispatches, concealed even from his colleagues in his embassy, uses expressions, which, though very ambiguous, may—it is for argument's sake conceded—bear an interpretation, which would seem to implicate Mr. Randolph in having improperly communicated to him some of the private views of the American Government, and even in having made some vague and obscure advances for loans of money.

Here we have the accuser, and this is the accusation, *in its utmost extent*. How is it at once met by the accused? With either the confusion, or the vehement resentment, which conscious guilt always assumes? No! but with a lofty, calm, dignified denial, which confounds even his enemies, and with an equanimity arising from conscious integrity, which even the indignity of their plots to take him by surprise could not disturb, adding to his denial the solemn sanction of an appeal to his God for its truth, by him, whose lightest word was never before questioned.

But who are the witnesses? and what their testimony against him? Why, this same French Minister is still used at once as the accuser and the sole witness against him, and this same secret, ambiguous dispatch, is at once the indictment and only testimony to sustain it. Is this witness called by the prosecuting party, to explain this very equivocal and ambiguous document? No; he is not even asked by them to furnish the two preceding dispatches, referred to in this, as the *key, and essential to its true meaning*. Compelled, then, to *prove a negative* by the sole witness for the prosecution—if witness he may be called—in defending himself from charges unsustained by any other testimony, the accused then calls on this Minister to explain what he meant by these equivocal expressions. What is his reply? Substantially this: "My language has been grossly misunderstood and misinterpreted. Never did I mean to impute—never did I dream of imputing to Mr. Randolph any of the motives, sentiments or conduct, which your mistaken inferences from my letter attribute to him. On the contrary, his character and conduct in his official and private intercourse with me, have ever been marked with the purest integrity, scrupulous discretion, and zealous fidelity to his country and its government. These, have always been my sentiments; as will be seen from my official correspondence with my government, which my successor in office (Mr. Adet) will verify."

How is *this* evidence of this witness for the prosecution now received by the prosecuting party? With a candid and honorable avowal of their error and injustice? No! but with a wholly groundless and shameless attempt to *discredit their own witness*, on whose misinterpreted letter alone their accusation rests; recklessly asserting, that what he now says, in correcting that misinterpretation, is only a tissue of unblushing falsehoods, concerted with the accused himself!! And yet, observe the altered circumstances, so much less favorable to the accused, under which he now speaks. On the moment of leaving the American coast in a French ship, in hourly danger of capture by a British frigate, he is

called on by a dismissed and disgraced public officer, shorn of all influence with his government, poor in wealth and poorer still in reputation—unless his innocence be established—who demands of him, as an act of justice, that he should, at no small inconvenience, explain his meaning in the dispatch which had caused his disgrace. Pride of consistency, reluctance to diminish the reputation he may have acquired by his former dispatch, for influence with the American Government, or at least indifference to what concerned one now so unimportant, might have inclined him to avoid what, had any of these charges been true, honor, truth, justice, and a regard for his own character, would have required him to refuse—the explanation and denial of all those charges, which his sense of justice compelled him freely to give. And yet this statement, *thus given*, is spurned and discredited, as *wholly false*, and the former equivocal expressions of *the same witness*, which it so fully and satisfactorily explains, unsustained by the testimony of one other witness, or by one single corroborating fact of circumstantial evidence, is insisted on as complete proof of atrocious guilt, in a man on whose character no stain had ever been found, elevated, as he was, to the second office in the nation, and who, bidding defiance to scrutiny, appealed to his God for the purity of his heart and uprightness of his conduct. Nor did he rest, as he might well have done, upon this denial, his defence to such absurd and proofless charges, until something like evidence had been adduced to sustain them. Instantly surrendering into the hands of his accusers the custody of his office and all the papers it contained, without again entering its doors, he with all *practicable* dispatch prepares and publishes his "Vindication," in which, vouching the public records and correspondence, as well as the recollection of the President, to whom it is addressed, for the accuracy of his facts, he challenges, *what has never since appeared, the refutation or denial of one of them*. It is true, the press, from that day to this, has teemed with denunciation and abuse by his political enemies and their descendants, contained in newspaper essays, in pamphlets, and in historical and biographical memoirs, compiled from the correspondence of these very accusers and parties to the transaction; but on examining all these, it will be seen, that in none of these numerous publications, pervading and perverting the literature and history of our country, has any attempt to disprove, and, except by the wholly unscrupulous and scurrilous, none to deny a single *fact* or document adduced in the "Vindication." They all consist of mere forced and unnatural inferences from Mr. Fauchet's first letter, afterwards so fully explained by him, which only the malignity of party hostility could invent, or the grossest and blindest party bigotry could entertain. And it is a fact, not a little significant, that whilst the published letters and papers of Washington, to whom the "Vindication" was addressed, contain a number of letters written by him on this subject *anterior* to its publication, all evincing the remarkable extent to which his feelings had been irritated, his judgment warped, towards his long-tried friend; yet they contain no syllable from Washington's pen, written *after* the publication of the "Vindication," denying or even questioning the truth of any portion of it! The fact of such a denial by Washington, rests solely on the catch-penny production by Rufus Griswold, entitled "The *Republican Court* of Washington"—a mere compilation of idle gossip, scandalous tales, and silly traditions, the falsehood of which has been demonstrated in some cases, and known in many more, in which he represents Washington as making this denial in language, and with oaths and violence, the brutality of which "alarmed the ladies at his table, who were gathered

together in the middle of the room, like a flock of partridges in a field when a hawk is in the neighborhood."

The only other man, it is believed, who ever ventured to deny or question the truth of any of the statements contained in the "Vindication," was *William Cobbett*, in his pamphlet entitled "A New Year's Gift for the Democrats, by Peter Porcupine." The notorious want of principle, political and moral, of this venal writer, who alternately advocated and denounced both parties in England and America, and the flagrant scurrility and mendacity of his writings, constitute a sufficient antidote to the poison of his unquestionable ingenuity and want of candor. An illustration of this is found in the argument used in the pamphlet just alluded to, that, if Mr. Randolph had been really innocent of the charges brought against him based on the intercepted letter of Fauchet, instead of following Fauchet to Rhode Island, and there, as he charges, concocting with Fauchet the explanation of the letter, he would have remained quietly in Philadelphia, and demanded of Washington, that he should *bring back Fauchet to Philadelphia*, and there, confronting him with the accused, call on him to prove his accusation—while Fauchet was anxiously watching, in Rhode Island, for the opportunity, which in a few days presented itself, of leaving a country and government, with whom he was greatly displeased, and of escaping the British frigate, which just outside the harbor, was watching to capture the French ship in which he was to sail. Plausible and deceptive to the ignorant or unreflecting, as this idea was, and was intended to be, no one knew better than William Cobbett, when he penned it, that the President of the United States had no more authority or control over the French Minister's person or movements, than over those of the King of England or of the Sultan of Turkey; whilst the state of feeling between them was the opposite extreme of that, which would induce Fauchet to subject himself to a far less degree of inconvenience and hazard, than his return to Philadelphia would have caused him. And yet from *this pamphlet*, published immediately after the "Vindication," has been drawn every false inference and argument—to facts it scarcely made pretension—which constitute all that has been written and published on this subject, in every variety of form, from that day to this, by the partizan writers and book-makers, chiefly the descendants and compilers of the papers of Mr. Randolph's political enemies and prosecutors.

The most prominent of these is a book called "Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, edited from the papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury," (contemporaneously with Mr. Randolph, and his chief enemy and accuser,) "by George Gibbs," Wolcott's grand-son, it is believed. This book contains, on this subject, merely Wolcott's own repetition of the same charges against Mr. Randolph already examined, which he had been the chief actor in preferring, and the abusive correspondence on the subject between him and his intimate personal and political partizans, who derived their information and opinions from him. It discloses, too, the fact,* that Wolcott employed spies, to ascertain *secretly* how, where, and with whom Mr. Randolph spent each moment of his time, day and night, while in Newport, and that all the evidences of treason which, even *in this way*, he could procure, were, that "when Mr. Randolph arrived there, *the boarding-houses being full*, he took lodg-

* Vol. I., pp. 296-7.

ings in a private house, procured for him by the keeper of the house where he dined:" that the inquisitor, having asked "the owner of this house and his wife *such questions*, as he thought would lead to a discovery of what he *wished to know*, could only learn, that between the part of the house where the family resided and where Mr. Randolph lodged there was no communication, and that" (as a necessary consequence,) "the front door of the house was left unlocked, that he might go in and out at what times he pleased"—*the inquisitor adds*, "without observation;" that this same inquisitor, prying into and violating the confidence and sanctity of unreserved conversation at a private dinner-table at Newport, had heard a gossiping tale; that in such a conversation, expressions of great disappointment and chagrin at the ill success of his mission, accompanied by *praises of Hamilton* and *contemptuous expressions towards Mr. Randolph*, had escaped the lips of Fauchet—of FAUCHET, who, to sustain these calumnies against Mr. Randolph, is, in the same breath, alleged to be his accomplice in concocting a false certificate to his entire innocence!!

In the preface to this book, its editor, in excusing his admitted "harshness, with which he has treated political opponents, whose enmities have long since died with them," avows, that "he has felt himself not only the vindicator, but in some sort the AVENGER of a by-gone party and a buried race." And this is the temper in which he undertakes to write HISTORY!!

The space allotted to this Preface forbids extending it by further extracts from these works. The last may be taken as a fair specimen of them all. In many of them, and particularly in Griswold's book, it is studiously attempted, by both insinuation and bold assertion, to create the impression that even Mr. Randolph's friends deemed his "Vindication" unsatisfactory. Let us briefly enquire into the truth of this. Reference might be here made to the well-known fact, that to the day of his death Mr. Randolph enjoyed the cordial and intimate friendship and confidence of such men as James Madison, James Monroe, and nearly every one of those great and good men of his day who had not been actually engaged in the conspiracy against him, which led to his resignation, of the written evidences of which fact we are deprived only by the loss and destruction, after his death, of his papers and correspondence. But of the utter falsehood of this intimation we have the *published evidence*, not only in the public journals of that day, but in a most able and conclusive defence of Mr. Randolph, contained in a pamphlet entitled "Political Truth," published at Philadelphia, by S. H. Smith, in 1796. The author of this pamphlet, whose name the editor of this has yet been unable to discover, but whose style and arguments proclaim him to be inferior to none, declares that, "unswayed by party motive, he means not to join in the general clamor against every leading measure of the government;" that he agrees entirely with neither party. "In deciding," he says, "upon the guilt or innocence of Mr. Randolph, it cannot be expected, that every charge urged by malice or folly should receive a circumstantial investigation. All of them, *however modified by the moulds in which they have been cast*," may be included under a few general heads. Instead of stating or discussing specifically the nature or the tendency of those political ephemerides, whose life was inglorious as it was short, I shall pursue truth in her most direct path, by analyzing the contents of No. 10, with the illustrating

* [NOTE.—These words italicised by the Editor.]