

**WILLIAM BRANCH GILES:
A STUDY IN THE POLITIS OF
VIRGINIA AND THE NATION
FROM 1790 TO 1830**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649020454

William Branch Giles: a Study in the Politis of Virginia and the Nation from 1790 to 1830 by
Dice Robins Anderson

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FROM 1790 TO 1830**

To
ADA ASH ANDERSON,
FAITHFUL CO-LABORER



WILLIAM BRANCH GILES

From a Miniature made in Washington 1813 and now in the possession of
Mrs. J. W. Sharp, Née Miss Elizabeth Townes, great-grand-
daughter of Governor Giles.

William Branch Giles: A Study in the Politics of Virginia and the Nation from 1790 to 1830

DICE ROBINS ANDERSON, B.A., M.A., PH.D.

*Professor and Head of the Department of History and
Political Science*

Richmond College, Richmond, Virginia.

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

The Collegiate Press

GEORGE BANTA PUBLISHING CO.
MENASHA, WIS.

1914

PREFACE

A life of William Branch Giles has long been a desideratum. His active labors in the formation of the Democratic-Republican Party, his long service in legislative bodies—the General Assembly of Virginia and the House of Representatives and Senate of the United States;—and his leadership in each of these bodies; his dramatic career as Governor; his spectacular appearance in newspaper and pamphlet literature as well as his reputation for marvellous forensic abilities; indeed the variety of his animosities and the conspicuousness of his many enemies—these things and others point him out as a figure worth studying. He was a friend of Jefferson and an enemy of Hamilton. He became a foe of Gallatin and Monroe. He finally espoused the cause of Andrew Jackson and developed into the bitterest of the enemies of John Quincy Adams. Like all men he went through cycles of political opinions. In the days of Jefferson he shared the idealism and enthusiasm of small farmers and artisans, of the Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists who crowded one another in trying to touch the hem of free-thinking Jefferson's garment; he fought against the National Bank, protective tariff, and the American Navy; he struggled against usurpations of power by the General Government. He came, however, to write drastic laws based on a broad construction of the Constitution and deplored lack of energy on the part of the Federal Government; he even coöperated in Federalist attacks on Republican administrators. He ended his career with the same ardor for State Rights and strict construction which had characterized his youth, but adopted a most un-Jeffersonian hostility to Democratic change in the Constitution of Virginia. He closed his days as an apostle of unyielding conservatism and as a prophet of secession.

The life of this remarkable Virginian has greatly interested the writer. If the story has been well told, it will interest the reader. It is a story difficult to put together because the materials have been extensive on those phases of the life which are least interesting, and scattered and few on those phases that

would prove most entertaining. Giles was a most generous public writer and copious speaker but apparently a very stingy letter writer. No effort has been omitted to discover material or to study it. Interpretation has likewise been no easy task. Although little work has heretofore been done on Giles's life, yet every writer of history for the period 1790-1830 has thought it his duty to give an estimate of this remarkable Virginian. A characteristic opinion is that of Henry Cabot Lodge who has spoken of him as a "coarse political ruffian" and "a rough, brazen, loud-voiced Virginian, fit for every bad work, no matter how desperate." The history of the time in which Giles lived has been written very largely by the descendants and partisans of his enemies—and their opinions of him have been unusually bad. It has been difficult to avoid accepting the views of the talented New England historians on the one hand or on the other, in a reaction from them, to avoid taking opinions from another school, equally as partisan. The task has been rendered the harder by the limitations of space the writer felt it necessary to obey.

The work has been made easier and more pleasant by the kind assistance of many generous friends. To Professors Dodd and McLaughlin of the University of Chicago, I owe a large debt of gratitude for years of kindness. Mr. Hunt and his staff at the Congressional Library; Dr. McIlwaine and his assistants at the Virginia State Library; Mr. Stanard and the Virginia Historical Society; Mr. Henry Adams, the famous historian of the administration of Jefferson and Madison; Mr. T. P. Giles and the members of the interested family; Dr. H. J. Eckenrode, my distinguished colleague in the Department of History at Richmond College; and many others in various parts of the country have helped when called upon.

I wish to acknowledge with particular gratitude the persistent kindness of Mr. Earl G. Swem, the immensely capable Assistant Librarian of the Virginia State Library who has several times read both the manuscript and the proof, and to Mr. E. J. Woodhouse, Instructor in History at Yale University, who gave unstintedly of his valuable time in token of a cordial friendship of many years' standing.

To my wife, more than to all others, I must make acknowledgment of never failing aid given in countless ways during the five years that this study has been around the house, and of many sacrifices which she has cheerfully made in behalf of my labor.

It is certainly only fair for me to express here my appreciation of the painstaking care, the unfailing courtesy and even the generosity of Mr. George Banta and his staff, the publishers of this book. They thoroughly know their craft, and yet are patient with young authors, who know neither the printer's craft nor their own.

I wish also to express here my appreciation of the action of the Illinois Division of the Daughters of the Confederacy in conferring upon the writer of these pages their prize for 1914. Whether their judgment as to this particular piece of work is correct or not, certain it is that their endeavor to encourage attempts at genuine scholarship in Southern History is worthy of emulation.

Richmond College, Richmond, Va.,
Sept. 2, 1914.

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