

**BULLETIN OF THE VIRGINIA STATE
LIBRARY. VOL. XI. JULY, OCTOBER
1918. NOS. 3,4. AN ANALYSIS OF
RUFFIN'S FARMERS' REGISTER, WITH A
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF EDMUND RUFFIN**

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EARL G. SWEM

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By EARL G. SWEM
Assistant State Librarian



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Introductory Note

The "Farmers' Register" was a monthly magazine of 64 pages, edited and published by Edmund Ruffin from June, 1833, to December, 1842. It was the second agricultural periodical published in Virginia. The first was the "Virginia Farmer," edited and published by Theodorick McRobert at Scottsville.* A short time after the advent of the Register, the "Virginia Farmer" ceased publication. Mr. Ruffin published his magazine under many difficulties. Although he had acquired a competence from farming as the result of the most patient investigation and most efficient management of the ancestral estate at Coggin's Point for the preceding twenty years, yet he had to overcome a strong popular prejudice against "book farming." Correspondents who were willing to write to him of farming conditions in other parts of the State were few, and could not be depended upon to write regularly. It was necessary therefore for him to prepare many of the papers in the Register himself, and sign them with initials that would not disclose the identity of the writer. In the N. F. Cabell manuscripts relating to agriculture in Virginia (now in the Virginia State Library), there is a list of all the anonymous authors in the ten volumes of the Register. This list was compiled by Mr. Ruffin at the request of Mr. Cabell. By means of this list, I have been able, in preparing this analysis, to determine the authors' names of nearly all the unsigned or anonymously signed articles. Mr. Cabell remarks that the large number of papers he found that Mr. Ruffin had written, and which no one had suspected were from his pen, was a distinct revelation to him. In addition to original contributions by himself and other Southern correspondents, he reprinted, occasionally, selected articles from American, British, and French agricultural journals.

In preparing this analysis, I have included references only to original contributions and to reprinted papers from southern periodicals.

The publisher made no money from the Register. He had undertaken it with no thought of pecuniary profit, but hoped that it would at least pay expenses. In order to be independent, he refused all advertisements, and would not use his editorial columns for "puffing" commercial projects which he knew to be dishonest. He eschewed all reference to politics until the volumes issued in 1841 and 1842. The intolerable burdens of the state banking system as then administered, he could bear no longer without some remonstrance. He spoke plainly and incisively. To his attitude at this time may be due the loss of some of the patronage of the Register, which he abandoned in December, 1842.

The "Farmers' Register" in its ten volumes is one of the most authoritative sources we have for the study of agricultural and other economic questions of the ante-bellum period in Virginia. And yet most students and writers have entirely neglected it, preferring to examine and quote the superficial and biased accounts of travelers in Virginia, and the partisan mis-statements of political speakers and newspaper editors. Mr. Ruffin was a hater of ignorance, of pretense, of self-satisfaction, whether displayed in the Virginia farmer who refused to acknowledge that farming could be written about, or in the northern agitator who believed that all economic ills of Virginia could be traced to slavery. These characteristics, coupled with his deep suspicion of professional politicians both north and south, give the Register a marked individuality.

When only 18 years of age, in 1812, he began his career as a farmer. A copy of John Taylor's "Arator" falling into his hands, he determined to apply some of the principles therein taught, to the development of his

*See note on "The Virginia Farmer" by Alfred Morrison in the "William and Mary College Quarterly," v. 23, p. 172. No copies of "The Virginia Farmer" are known to be extant. Several numbers were issued, but how many is not known.