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EDWARD RUTLEDGE TO HIS SON, AUGUST 2, 1796

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Two of the foremost objectives of the new American republic in the 1790's were the expansion of its overseas and continental trade, and the preservation of peace on the frontier. These objectives were difficult to attain, particularly after France and England went to war in February of 1793. The United States had obligations to France as the result of the Treaty of Alliance concluded in 1778, yet the Washington administration strongly desired to maintain amicable relations with England.

Charting a course that would offend neither of the great powers was complicated by the ardent sympathizers of either France or England. Each faction urged the necessity or expediency of shaping national policy to benefit its favorite.[1] The desire of President George Washington to placate the "Anglophiles" or the "Jacobins" was reflected in his appointment of ministers to France. Gouverneur Morris, a landed aristocrat of New York, was appointed United States minister to France in 1792. Morris' indiscreet conduct and antirepublican principles were offensive to the Jacobin government, and his recall was requested at the same time the United States government asked the recall of the intriguing French minister in Phildelphia, Edmond Genet.[2] James Monroe, a Republican Senator from Virginia, was chosen to replace Morris in Paris, but his appointment caused dissatisfaction among ardent Federalists who felt that Monroe's well-known sympathy for the French Revolution would unnecessarily offend England. When Monroe delivered a warm speech to the French National Convention, extolling the ties of principle and interest between the two nations, and subsequently received the fraternal embrace from the President, who also noted that the "sweetest fraternity" united the two republics, Federalists were alarmed.[3]

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[1] For details on the struggle within the Washington administration for control of foreign policy, see Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance; Politics and Diplomacy under George Washington* (Durham, N. C., 1958).

[2] Howard Swiggett, *The Extraordinary Mr. Morris* (Garden City, N. Y., 1952), 224; DeConde, *Entangling Alliance,* 296-306, 337-341.

[3] Monroe's speech and the reply of the president of the Convention are in *American State Papers, Foreign Relations,* I, 672-674. For the American reaction to this episode, see Frederick J. Turner, ed., *Correspondence of the French Ministers, 1791-1797* in American Historical Association *Annual Report, 1903* (2 vols., Washington, 1904), II, 442-443, 474-476.

Various other incidents increased the Washington administration's dissatisfaction with Monroe; on his part, Monroe was unhappy because he believed the administration had deceived him while it was negotiating the Jay Treaty with England. Based on information supplied him by John Jay and the State Department, Monroe had repeatedly assured the French government that nothing in the projected pact would violate the Alliance Treaty of 1778. When the results of the Jay negotiations became known, Monroe was discredited in the eyes of the French government. The Jay Treaty angered the French because in it the United States acquiesced to the British paper blockade of French Caribbean possessions, an area which the United States had contracted to defend in the French Treaty of Alliance of 1778.[4] The French government concluded that Monroe had misled them, or that he had been misinformed by his superiors; either Monroe was a dishonest man or he lacked the confidence of the government which had appointed him.[5]

Plans were being made in the United States to relieve Monroe of his duties, but choosing a successor was a difficult task. Neither man representing the two factions, Morris and Monroe, had proved a satisfactory minister. In order to unite the country, Alexander Hamilton reasoned, the new minister must "be at the same time a friend to the government and understood to be not unfriendly to the French Revolution." Political neutrals of competence and national standing were difficult to find by 1796. After considering several names, Hamilton wrote to Washington that "General [Charles Cotesworth] Pinckney is the only man . . . who fully satisfies the idea." [6]

In tendering the position to Charles C. Pinckney, Washington described the country as disturbed by an unpatriotic faction, "more disposed to promote the views of another [France], than to establish a national character of their own. . . ." The post, Washington continued, demanded a man "whose abilities and celebrity of character are well known to the people" of all sections, and "who ought, as far as the nature of the case will admit, be acceptable to all parties." "Where then," Washington asked, "can a man be found that would answer this description better than yourself?" [7]

Upon receiving Washington's invitation, Pinckney immediately consulted his close friend, business partner, and brother-in-law, Edward Rutledge. In the letter that follows, Rutledge discusses Pinckney's appointment with his son Henry. Rutledge indicates that Pinckney viewed himself as a political neutral—

[4] DeConde, *Entangling Alliance*, 377.

[5] William P. Cresson, *James Monroe* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1946), 137-147.

[6] Hamilton to Washington, July 5, 1796, in Henry C. Lodge, ed., *The Works of Alexander Hamilton* (12 vols., N. Y., 1904), X, 180-181.

[7] Washington to Pinckney, Mount Vernon, July 8, 1796, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* (39 vols., Washington, D. C., 1931-1944), XXXV, 129-130.

a man acceptable to both parties—and agreed to assume the proffered post as a patriotic duty.[8]

Beyond this political note, Rutledge's letter is interesting for the personal attitudes it reveals. The inevitability of public service for men of virtue and family is the main theme of the letter. Rutledge urges his son to prepare himself for future public duties by capitalizing on the opportunities which he will have as his uncle's secretary. Firsthand observation of the European governments will prepare Henry for his destined role in government. The privilege of reading law under the learned Pinckney, Rutledge stresses, is a rare advantage for one entering the legal profession. Rutledge's suggestions on the proper conduct for diplomatic personnel is a model that could profitably be read by contemporary foreign service staff. The warmth of Rutledge's tone and the very length of the letter suggest that Rutledge was bestowing part of his legacy before he died—the legacy of advice and counsel that flowed from his twenty-three years' experience as lawyer, legislator, and statesman.

Henry Rutledge accepted the position as Charles C. Pinckney's secretary, and served with his uncle through the trying days of expulsion from France and the subsequent "XYZ" mission. The amount of law which he read during this two-year period is not known, but the father's wish that he be able to observe the ways of European governments was abundantly fulfilled.

August 2, 1796[9]

My dearest Henry,

I wrote you on the 30th. ult. informing you of your Uncle Pinckney's appointment to a place of honorable importance in Europe, acquainting you to hold yourself in readiness to join him on the first summons, and hinting that your presence would be required. He will be himself the bearer of this letter, and will deliver it with his own hands, I shall therefore write you without restraint.

The President having judged it absolutely necessary to recall Mr. Monroe from France, and send some person to that Republic, in whom he could confide and to whom no objection could be taken by either of the parties which unhappily divide the States, wrote to your Uncle Pinckney

[8] Historians have generally assumed that Pinckney was a staunch Federalist throughout the 1790's, but the evidence suggests that he was a friend of the French Revolution. It was not until Pinckney was rudely handled by the French in 1796 that he began to identify himself solely with Federalist policies. See Charles C. Pinckney to Thomas Pinckney, Charleston, January 7, 1793, Pinckney Family Papers, Library of Congress; Létombe to Charles Delacroix, Philadelphia, May 6, 1797, in Turner, ed., *Correspondence of the French Ministers,* 1018.

[9] This letter was presented by Mrs. Francis B. Stewart to the South Carolina Historical Society. The ampersand is here expanded and the terminal dash eliminated.

a very full letter on the occasion, urging him by the love which he bore his Country, and by the regard he had for her safety, to dedicate himself to her service; and stating the situation of things to be such, as left him in my opinion without a reasonable excuse.[10] As soon as he received the letter, he placed it in my hands; we viewed the affair in various points; and altho it was manifest that he would make a considerable sacrifice of professional emolument and would hazard the malice of his enemies, and part with a portion of his own tranquillity, by an acceptance of the appointment; yet if there were occasions and seasons, in which all private considerations, were to yield to public good, the present hour required that he should not view himself in the light of an individual. Such being the result of our reflections, he wrote to the President, notifying his acceptance, and sent off his dispatches by two different conveyances.[11] I saw him the next day, and in making his arrangements his mind turned itself towards you. It is not necessary to repeat every thing he said in favor of one who is generally known to possess a large share of his affection; he however expressed a wish to have you near him, said he should write for you the moment he landed; desired I would signify his intention to you; spake a good deal of the implicit confidence which should subsist between a Minister, and his private Secretary, and concluded by saying as he could place that confidence in you, he should make you his Secretary, if on further consideration he did not think, it would not be injurious to your interest. I saw him again the next Day; he told me he had decided the matter in his own Mind—that you must be his private Secretary—and that he would undertake to direct your legal Studies. Thus then Mr. Secretary, I give you joy of your appointment which is honorable in itself; made more so, by the manner in which it has been conferred and by the Minister with whom you are connected.

The Salary annexed to your station is 300. [?] [pounds] pr. annum, and I suppose the addition of as much more from me, will answer all your purposes. If it should not, speak with freedom, and your desires shall be gratified with chearfulness. And now, my very dear Son, I hope you will readily agree with me, in thinking that the situation in which you are to be fixed, is as eligible as could possibly have been imagined.

[10] Washington had previously offered Pinckney the positions of Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State. See Fitzptrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXXI, 290-291; XXXIII, 249; XXXIV, 285-286. Pinckney declined every offer, probably because of his need to recoup financial losses suffered during the Revolutionary War.

[11] Pinckney answered Washington on July 27, 1796.

You know as well as I do, that the profession of the Law opens the way in America, to the most important Offices in the Union: and altho' I am fully convinced you are neither anxious, or desirous of entering on public duties, yet at certain times, and in certain seasons it is so absolutely incumbent on Men of talents, and independence, and virtue, to participate in the affairs of the Republic, that I consider your chance for retirement to be small indeed. The family my Son from which you have descended; the style of your education; the long and steady attachment of your uncle Pinckney towards you; the early acquaintance which you have formed with public men; the habits to which they themselves are accustomed of considering your nearest connections, as the property of their Country, form such a combination of circumstances as forbid the idea of private Life. Look my Son, into the bosom of America, and you will soon become sensible, that she will be exposed to many rude attacks within, as well as from without, many sharp conflicts, and many convulsive struggles. She is not alone the asylum of the virtuous, she is also the receptacle of the wicked—like the beams of the heavenly Luminary, she shines upon the unjust, as well as the just. The constant migrations from every part of Europe, has given her an unnatural population, and from the conflicts which will be the Offspring of these opposite passions, many and serious evils may be expected to arise. In such a state of things, it will be incumbent on the descendants of those, to whom America is indebted for her Independence to vindicate the rights of their Country and maintain them with as sacred a piety, as they would the reputation of their ancestors. In times like these, I should blush, if the crest of my young Henry was not brightened by honor, and his hours perpetually devoted to active Virtue! The means are placed within your reach; you stand on a commanding eminence, avail yourself of the advantages which are now afforded you, and you may easily become an excellent Lawyer, and an able politician. A confidential Secretary to so near a relation, and to so excellent a Friend, and that in a Republic, so peculiarly circumstanced as France; will furnish opportunities of acquiring a minute knowledge of the politic's of *her* government, as well as of our own, and most probably of many countries of Europe. The American revolution gave rise to a new order of things in France. The French revolution has given rise to a new order of things in Europe; You will be on the Theatre of public Life, from whence you will mark the progressive changes, and by a cool and steady attention discover what occurrences arise, which may be turned to the advantage of your own country: or if no benefits can be drawn from their conduct, a knowledge of their circumstances, may enable you to avert some evils, from your own States.

But whilst you are studious to acquire a knowledge of the politic's of other countries, remember that you are by no means to commit your own. Hear every thing—learn every thing—reflect on every thing—combine every thing—combine them with the persons from whom they come—the occasion which gave rise to them; and the circumstances which attend them—so far as to others—but give nothing in return, unless it may be of such a nature, as will establish a valuable opinion of your nation: recollect on all occasions, that you are the repository of the secrets of your minister—your relation—your friend—your country.—that all your sentiments will be imparted to him, and that he will be thought responsible in the public opinion, for such as you deliver; let me advise you therefore to carry an open unreserved countenance, but a mind perfectly reserved on all political subjects, unless your Minister should wish you to speak, which he sometimes will do—either for the purpose of making a wished for impression, or acquiring by conversation a desirable piece of information; and on all these occasions commit to paper the heads of what it may be fit to say, previous to your entering on the business: take minutes of all *important* conversations; in the line of your Office, take minutes of *all* conversations, for they may become important. Study the characters of all diplomatic Men from the different nations, as far as opportunities occur, particularly from those nations, with which we are or probably may be connected; mark the fort, and the foible of each—and in a word 'avail yourself of your situation.' So unbounded is the affection of your Uncle, so much accustomed has he been to consider my Children, with the love which he feels for his own; and so attached has he ever been to you, my Son, that it is his intention, you shall domesticate with him; he conceives that such a position, (without interrupting the pleasures, which at your time of life are natural,) will tend considerably to your advantage. I was delighted at the proposal. It will give you at all times, free access to much wisdom and knowledge, and I can safely add to much Virtue, in him, who has been my Friend, for upwards of three and twenty years, who has been attached to you, from your infancy; and who has given, on all occasions the strongest proofs of his confidence in you. It is under his direction, and his roof my dear Son, that you are to pursue and finish, I hope your legal studies. But why should I confine your pursuit to *legal* studies, when he, by whom you will be directed is in fact, a reservoir of knowledge, and unites in himself, those various branches of science, which please, instruct, and illumine society. Attend to him closely and my opinion will be justified by your own observations. This is the season, my Son for improvement—surrounded by genius; in the midst of the arts and sciences; selected from

among your countrymen at the age of one and twenty, by him, who in a time of peril has been himself selected, to fill so important a station—chosen as he has been with a view to unite all parties; placed as you will be under the roof of my Friend, and directed in your studies by his wisdom; how does my heart dilate with joy, and how are my hopes excited.—dilated and excited in favor of a Son, whom I love, and admire, with the fondest affection, and who is deserving of all the affection I can bestow. How often my Son, have I endeavored thro' life to impress you with sentiments, of my peculiar attachment, and how inadequate were all my expressions to the sensations which I felt towards you; but my actions I trust have given utterance to my heart, and my wishes, for your happiness have been embodied by my conduct. But to return—you know my Child, that the profession of the Law, is not only to be the scaffold on which you are to rise into public life but it is to be the means from whence you will draw a considerable part of your support. You are not only to profess it—but you must practice it, and practice it as extensively as possible; it must not at first be taken up as an amusement; it must be enter'd upon as a business; have courage for the undertaking, and however paradoxical it may appear, at first sight, give me leave to assure you, that the wider the sphere of action, the greater will be your delight, and the easier your labors. The subjects of litigation in this country, lie within narrow limits; a thorough knowledge of those subjects, will fit you for practice—daily practice, will render the science perfectly habitual, and you will decide a legal question, with as much facility, as a mathematician will solve a problem, which he is accustom'd to work every day. On the contrary, when business seldom occurs, we soon become indolent, and forgetful. I expect you will have a good deal to do in your character of Secretary, but you will find abundant [sic] of time to study, and under the direction of One, who can point out the most necessary branches; I hope you will be perfect Master of your profession, before you take leave of each other. The circumstance of your finishing your studies, under his direction, will soon be known, and the celebrity with which you will be introduced to practice, will I hope receive new lustre from your own conduct. But my dearest Son, a knowledge of the law, will not of itself be sufficient to establish you in the list of fame. You must be logical, and eloquent, as well as learned; the first will enable you to reason closely, the second will adorn your argument; each of these qualities will indeed enable you to do much, for they are valuable, but when united, and united in a good cause, they become irresistable; you will reside among a people of orators, as well as a people of Heroes; your appointment will give you access of course to their

public tribunals, there, you will become familiar with eloquence, and catch its sacred fire. I am told that the most able speakers, speak with great deliberation; attend to their manner; attend to your own utterance and speak, not as if you were anxious to get rid of your subject, but as if you were anxiously desirous to impress your audience with a conviction of the rectitude of your sentiments: I speak to you the more freely of this defect in elocution, because I myself have been frequently exposed to it; I have often remarked it in my own speeches, and found it difficult to correct; it is no small token of my affection for you, when I point to my own errors, that you may avoid them; the charms of melody are great, attend to the modulation of your voice. I had more to say, but I think I have said enough for the present, I hope you will not think I have said too much. If you should be inclined to differ with me on this point—recollect that I have had the advantage of great experience, and the opportunities of much observation, 'in Times that tried Mens souls.' and that the experience and observation of an affectionate Father, transmitted to an admired Son, is sometimes the fairest part of his inheritance,[12] and having now discharged my duty in the best manner possible, according to that portion of wisdom with which providence has been graciously pleased to endow me, I have at present nothing more to add, than to commend you, as I sincerely do to the God of our Fathers, hoping and trusting, that he will confirm you on all virtuous habits, enlighten you with all true wisdom; adorn you with bright and luminous qualities; establish you as the protector of innocence—the defender of justice, and the firm friend of human nature, that you may experience through life, those blessings, which usually flow in upon a character, formed by such a constellation of excellence, and that your children, and your children's children may partake of the rich portion of your virtues.

God! bless you—Your affectionate Father

Ed: Rutledge

[12] Rutledge spoke more truly than he knew. When he died in 1800, midway in his term as Governor of South Carolina, his financial affairs were shortly found to be in disorder, and he evidently left his son little more than advice. See Henry W. DeSaussure to [John Rutledge, Jun.], August 25, [1801], John Rutledge Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.