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## HENRY MIDDLETON RUTLEDGE TO HIS FATHER, NOVEMBER 1, 1797

JOHN L. BRITTAIN\*

Early in 1796, following an extensive tour of his native America, Henry M. Rutledge, a member of a prominent South Carolina family, departed Charleston for England where he hoped to complete his legal education.<sup>1</sup> Advised his father, Edward Rutledge, "the profession of the law opens the way in America," he also reminded the young man that law was the "scaffold" on which the latter's future political and economic successes would be established.<sup>2</sup> But for Edward Rutledge, wealthy Charleston planter, skilled lawyer, and future governor of his state, the voyage to England promised for Henry more than merely a formal education. The elder Rutledge, as his several letters to Henry indicate, considered travel itself an education, an opportunity for intellectual development, broadening of horizons, and reduction or elimination of personal prejudice.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly Edward Rutledge concurred with the incessant wanderer William Hazlitt, who in 1826 wrote that "the object of travel is to see and learn"<sup>4</sup> (and not, as is the aim of most foreign travel today, entertainment); Rutledge surely shared the opinion of many in America and England that a visit to the Continent represented a completing or crown of an education.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, in July of 1796, when Henry Rutledge arrived in London, neither he nor his father had envisioned the unique opportunities which circumstances would soon make available to him. A letter from Edward Rutledge dated August 2 changed significantly both the purpose and the intended results of the young American's sojourn abroad. For Henry learned that Charles Cotesworth Pinckney had re-

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Rutledge to his daughter Sarah Rutledge, June 4, 1795, Miscellaneous Manuscripts A.C. 64-15, South Carolina Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin R. Zahniser, ed., "Edward Rutledge to his Son, August 2, 1796," this *Magazine* 64 (1963): 69, 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; Edward Rutledge to Henry Rutledge, Sept. 5, 1796, and Oct. 20, 1796, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Burgess and Francis Haskell, *The Age of the Grand Tour* (New York, 1967), p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> In the eighteenth century, such a perception constituted a major component of the age's philosophical views on the education of the young and wealthy. See George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1969), pp. 122, 125-126, and *passim*.

cently been appointed by President Washington as United States Minister to France and that Pinckney had requested that Henry serve him in Paris as his private secretary.<sup>6</sup> The enthusiasm of the elder Rutledge for his son's appointment, as well as an obvious, favorable bias toward the French, appears clearly from his letter. In it he strongly urged Henry to avail himself of the advantages and the experiences which the post would afford. The father considered it not only a great opportunity for Henry to perfect his language, but also to familiarize himself with different nations and governments so that he might be trained to play his expected part in the affairs of his own one day. "You will," Edward wrote, "reside among a people of orators, as well as a people of Heroes," and it was his fondest expectation that, while in Paris, Henry would "become familiar with eloquence, and catch its sacred fire."<sup>7</sup> Persuaded by his father's arguments and supplied with letters of introduction to "men of real worth," Henry suspended his legal studies and left England for Paris, arriving there in the early fall of 1796; he was but twenty-one years old at the time.<sup>8</sup>

Henry Rutledge's visit to the Continent, with residence divided between Paris and Holland, was prolonged for considerably more than a year.<sup>9</sup> As C. C. Pinckney's private secretary he had an excellent position from which to observe closely the intricacies of European politics and diplomacy while enjoying for a time the pleasures of French and Continental society. Newly arrived in Revolutionary Paris, he must (as did the contemporary poet William Wordsworth) have found it bliss in that dawn to be alive. According to a Swiss visitor in Paris, pleasure remained the order of the day in the French capital,<sup>10</sup> and it is known that Henry that fall attended parties at the home of the notorious Thérèse Tallien. To her *salon* on the Champs-Élysées flocked politicians, soldiers, intellectuals, and rich contractors. And there too, just a few months earlier, a certain Napoleon Bonaparte had been introduced to the recently wid-

<sup>6</sup> Henry Rutledge was the nephew of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney's late wife Sarah Middleton.

<sup>7</sup> Zahniser, "Edward Rutledge to his Son," pp. 67-72. Similar sentiments are expressed in a letter dated July 21, 1796, from Edward Rutledge to Henry, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Rutledge to Henry Rutledge, Sept. 5, 1796, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Henry arrived in Paris before his uncle had landed at Bordeaux. Mary Stead Pinckney to Margaret Izard Manigault, Nov. 16, 1796, in Charles F. McCombs, ed., *Letter Book of Mary Stead Pinckney* (New York, 1946), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Henry would return to England only in July of 1798. Henry Rutledge to William vane Murray, July 19, 1798, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest John Knapton, *Empress Josephine* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 91.

owed Josephine de Beauharnais who shared with Madame Tallien and the celebrated Juliette R camier leadership of Directorial society.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Pinckney's diplomatic mission proved to be a complete failure. As is well known, the French authorities consistently refused to accept his credentials, and in February of 1797 ordered him out of France. Pinckney moved his family and Henry Rutledge to Holland and remained there for seven months. They returned to the French capital only in September upon the Adams administration's decision to have Pinckney once more attempt to negotiate a settlement with France.

These experiences left with Henry Rutledge strong impressions, not a few of them negative in nature. Although excited by the prospect of returning to Paris, Henry remained dubious of his uncle's chances for success, remarking in a letter to his father (August 10, 1797) that, regarding French attitudes, "I should pronounce them less amicable than ever." Not hiding his total disillusionment, he even confessed to being "almost tired of these confounded politics," and conjectured how pleasant the prospect of being either in England pursuing his studies or back in South Carolina relieving his father of some of the latter's numerous responsibilities.<sup>12</sup>

Henry Rutledge's tone of pessimism and despair is reflected still more vividly in a letter to his father dated November 1, 1797, and written a short while after his return from Paris.<sup>13</sup> Besides restating the belief that Pinckney's diplomatic efforts would come to nothing, his epistle provides interesting insights into late eighteenth century politics as well as illustrating certain aspects of the character and attitudes of a young American visiting abroad. Sounding very much like a moralist, Henry denounces the potential corruption of native manners which allegedly is the result sometimes of a visit to Europe — "an education of the flesh and the spirit at the same time."<sup>14</sup> In contrast, there is evidenced an admiring attitude of patriotic provinciality toward his native country whose values he tends to interpret conceptually as being yet uncorrupted by superfluous civilization or sophistication. The manuscript is reproduced below in its entirety.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-93; Martyn Lyons, *France Under the Directory* (Cambridge, England, 1975), pp. 65-67; Felix Markham, *Napoleon* (New York, 1963), p. 30; McCombs, *Letter Book*, pp. 30-33, 58-59, 100, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Rutledge to Edward, Aug. 10, 1797, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Rutledge arrived in Paris on Sept. 27, 1797. Henry Rutledge to Edward, Oct. 2, 1797, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>14</sup> Burgess and Haskell, *The Age of the Grand Tour*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Archives Nationales*, F<sup>7</sup> 4268, dr. 9, *lettres de MM Pinckney, Marshall, et Gerry*. The author acknowledges his gratitude to Monsieur F. Dousset, Adjoint au Directeur General des Archives de France, for granting him permission to publish the letter in this *Magazine*.

Paris, November 1st, 1797

My dear father,

I have had the pleasure of writing to you twice since my arrival here, once by the way of England, and again by the way of New York by a vessel which I was informed was to sail from Harve. I hope both letters may reach you in safety, as I begin to experience the uneasiness which arises from a long silence, on the part of those who are as dear, as we are to each other. I have not received a line from home since I left Holland, and my last news of you are still in July. Not that the space of time is such as to surprise me, but the punctuality with which I have been accustomed to hear has made me a little sensible to disappointment.

At the date of my last, the state of our affairs was such as not to permit me to form a decided opinion, where, I should pass the winter. They have now so far assumed another aspect as to make me tolerably certain that Paris will not be the place of my residence — Considering myself as attached to the fate of the Legation. I am as you may imagine much puzzled how to dispose of my person, reflecting as I do upon the impression which political events must make upon the private plans of the Citizens of America; more particularly of those in our part of the continent. Regarding my Secretaryship as at an end, it becomes me to consider, how far it is probable that future events may permit me to put into practice my original plans, and whether at least, I may return to England with the prospect of pursuing my proffession, for any thing like a time sufficient to induce me to fix myself. From the view which actual circumstances present, I can have little hopes of this being the case. When once however I shall have made up my mind on this, as a thing of the highest improbability, I think it will be most proper to take my resolution without delay, and embark for America either from this country or from England, if we are permitted to go there. For certainly as soon as it is decided that I can do nothing in Europe, I should be regulated by the state of my finances, which considering their combination with yours, will suffer me to take no measure which is attended with unnecessary expense.

Since the appointment which General Pinckney has had the goodness to bestow upon me, I have been enabled to live at so little expense, that I have drawn nothing of the remittances you were so good as to make to England, & have saved a trifle out of my year's Salary. This fund will be fully sufficient to maintain me when my functions shall cease, untill the moment that I may quit Europe let me go from what part of it I may. It would indeed be more than adequate, but I shall have to provide for our young friend States,<sup>16</sup> whose own purse would not be equal to removing

<sup>16</sup> Henry's young cousin States Rutledge, son of Edward Rutledge's brother John.

him many leagues from Paris, considering the expensive mode of traveling which is in practice here, & the money one is always obliged to spend when in motion. His fifty pounds are not yet spent, but I do not know how much we shall have left when he pays twenty out of it to a Mr. Sargent, with whom he came over, & from whom he borrowed to that amount, with the assistance, (he says) of Williams. How far I may gain approbation, by this measure relative to States, I am totally ignorant, having never received a line, on the subject, providing for a similar event. But as JR<sup>17</sup> has recommended him particularly to my disposal, I feel myself at liberty to take, the only step, which to me appears proper. It would be impossible in case of our being obliged to quit this country, for him, to remain, and at the present stage of his education, a school in some parts of America, would offer him as many advantages as he would derive from a residence in England. Add to that the danger of permitting him to stay very long in Europe at an age when we are liable to be detached from the habits of our country, and acquire others, which it costs us much afterwards to gratify. These considerations, will I hope preclude any unpleasant surprize should his friends see him make his appearance in case I should be obliged to return.

With regard to myself I am very little affected at the idea of what I shall lose by curtailing my European trip. The time which I have passed in this part of the globe has been enough to sicken and disgust, & to fix my views for the rest of my days, on my own country. Nor do I feel at all anxious to change my opinion, by further observation. If I am not much advanced in talents by my coming abroad, I am at least improved in experience and have collected already, materials for more reflections, than will be pleasant. I have been relieved from many prejudices, without having had time to acquire many others. In short, I believe that I am fitted to return to America, after having seen enough of Europe to make me thank my fate which had made me an American. If however circumstances permitted, I think that a year or two longer spent on this side of the water, in the manner in which I should desire to spend it, would be for my improvement, but that would not be by a residence in France. Nor with such health as I have experienced, until lately, I should prefer pursuing my profession in England, and devoting myself totally to the acquisition of that knowledge to which I am to owe my subsistence. Not being desirous of coming again on the Continent except perhaps for a trip of a few months to Spain, for the purpose of learning the language as you are desirous that I should know it. I have not had an opportunity of acquiring any knowledge of it, as Holland was the only part in which I

<sup>17</sup> The reference is undoubtedly to John Rutledge, States' father.

could consider myself in a state of permanency, & there I could get no master to instruct me.

I hope my dear father that you will have confidence enough in me to be persuaded that I shall act in this critical occasion, according to the dictates of what my judgment shall tell me to be prudent, honorable, & proper, and not from the impulse of momentary preference or caprice.

I write thus fully because nothing warrants me in thinking that the objects of the Mission will be fulfilled, or that our stay in this country, will be more than momentary. I do not however say that you will see me soon, but at least if you do, be not surprized. At all events I shall be regulated "d'après les circonstances."

I suppose that other conveyances of a more direct nature will acquaint you with the event of the definitive articles having been signed between the Emperor and this country.<sup>18</sup> There are great differences of opinion of the question whether the French have made as good terms as they were entitled to, or rather whether they have not given up more than they ought in conceding Venice, Itria, & Dalmatia. As they by that means leave the Emperor, perhaps more powerful than when he began the war. This government, makes great parade of its hostile intentions on Great Britain. It does not in my opinion take the most direct [means of] attacking that power by dismantling their ships of war, which is at present the case, except with regard to a few frigates, which are hired out, & comissioned as privateers, & which they may very soon expect to be picked up by the Crusers of their ennemies.

I will not give you any news because I do not know when this letter will reach you, or I should rather say when I shall be enabled to send it. Remember me affectionately to my Mother, Sister and family. I am at this moment much occupied, but expect to find time to write a line to Simons. Adieu, & believe me ever yours.

Henry M. Rutledge.

<sup>18</sup> On Oct. 17, 1797, France had signed with Austria, following the conclusion of Napoleon's brilliant Italian campaign, the treaty of Campo Formio ending a war which had begun in 1792.