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Joseph Gales Esquire
With the respects of William T. Read

1
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

CÆSAR AUGUSTUS RODNEY,

READ BEFORE THE

GRAND LODGE

OF

DELAWARE,

By William T. Read,

GRAND MASTER OF MASONS IN DELAWARE,

JUNE 27th, 1853.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE GRAND LODGE.

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1853.

At the annual Grand Communication of the Grand Lodge of Delaware, in June, 5853, the following Resolution was adopted :

On motion of Br. Allen W. Leslie,

Resolved, That the thanks of this Grand Lodge be respectfully tendered to the M. W. Grand Master for his interesting and instructive Address, and that it be printed with the proceedings of this Grand Lodge.

A true copy,

Attest, GEORGE W. CHAYTOR,
Grand Secretary.

Grand Secretary's Office, Wilmington, Dec. 1st, 5853.

GRAND MASTER'S ADDRESS.

BRETHREN :

Having filled for three years the office of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Delaware, and by its Constitution being now ineligible to this office, the relation in which I stand to you must soon be terminated.

I thank you for the honor you have done me—much, very much exceeding my deserts—in thrice electing me Grand master of Masons in Delaware.

If in the execution of this office I have erred, and it would be foolish as well as arrogant to assume I have not, I beg you to believe I have not done so wilfully.

The year which has elapsed since I last addressed you has been distinguished by no occurrence of special interest in the Lodges within our jurisdiction, which have been working with diligence and unbroken harmony, and have added to their members by initiations.

My official acts during this period have been unimportant, therefore, without enumerating them, I will proceed, at once, to the subject which I have chosen for my "Address" on the present occasion, a "Biographical Sketch of Cæsar A. Rodney," which, delineated, it may be, with a feeble hand, is not irrelevant; for surely, the virtues our venerable institution teaches can be presented in no way better suited to win our attention, and enkindle our love for them and incite us to practice them, than as exemplified by an eminent brother.

CÆSAR AUGUSTUS RODNEY, was born in Dover, in Kent County, in the State of Delaware, on the 4th day of January, 1772. He was the son of Colonel Thomas Rodney and Elizabeth Fisher. His family is of great antiquity in England. Sir Walter de Rodney,

its founder, having come in the twelfth century, from Normandy, as a follower of the Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry the First, and having been distinguished in the war she waged with the usurper Stephen. His descendents were possessed of many manors, and were actors, and prominent ones, in the stormy periods through which they lived. But, at last, by divisions of its estates, in several generations of the family, lavish expenditures, advances, to aid the royal cause in the time of the great rebellion, and forfeitures, upon the success of the popular party, its wealth and importance were greatly diminished. Soon after the settlement of Pennsylvania, William Rodney, who had married Alice, daughter of Sir Thomas Cæsar, an eminent London merchant, migrated to that province, and finally settled in Kent County, Delaware; where he took an active and prominent part in public affairs, and was the first Speaker of the first House of Assembly of the three lower counties on Delaware. He died in 1708, leaving eight children, and a large entailed estate, most of which, by the decease of nearly all of them, without issue, came to the youngest of his sons, Cæsar, who was benevolent, unambitious and undistinguished. He married the daughter of the Reverend Thomas Crawford, the first missionary to Dover, Delaware, of the venerable "Society for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts," a pious, learned and diligent minister of the Church. Among the eight children of this marriage were Cæsar, the signer of the declaration of Independence, and Colonel Thomas Rodney.* I have been informed by an eminent gentleman, far advanced in life, formerly resident in Dover, Delaware, that in his youth, he well knew Thos. Rodney,—a grey-headed man—much respected—of small property—not a householder but living with his friends—reputed a man of extensive reading, and having good knowledge of law, though not a lawyer by profession—a writer of essays for newspapers, and somewhat excentric in his opinions—and that he was appointed by President Jefferson a Judge in the Territory of Mississippi, where he died, in that office, having acquired considerable property.†—To Thomas Rodney was made the remarkable communication by

* His daughter Lavinia was married to John Fisher, late Judge of the U. States District Court for the district of Delaware.

† Biography of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence, vol. 4, pp. 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318.

General Charles Lee "*that he was the author of Junius.*" Lee, with great military talents, was vain, insatiably ambitious, and unscrupulous, and with some good qualities, very excentric. Soured by the disappointment of brilliant hopes, he became neglectful of the common decencies of life, and terminated his career, full of romantic incidents, in fierce misanthropy, almost like a beast of the jungle or forest in its lair. This statement may be found on pages 76 and 77 of the Preliminary Essay to the London edition of Junius of 1812, republished in Philadelphia in 1813. That Lee made this statement to Thomas Rodney is certain, but it has been proved a pure fiction by the comparison of his style and political opinions with those of Junius, and his absence from England, when the "letters of Junius" were published, and that writer frequently communicating with Woodfall.

Mr. Rodney was brought up by his uncle Cæsar, who was pre-eminent among the patriots of our revolution for ardent attachment to the cause of his country. His talents, consecrated to the public weal, gave him great influence in that august assembly, the continental Congress, while the amenity of his manners and the playfulness of his wit made him the darling of his friends. From this venerable man, in whom the stern virtue of an old Roman was softened by the heaven-born influences of our favored era, Mr. Rodney, doubtless, imbibed that admiration of our civil institutions which distinguished him. His uncle made provision in his will for his education, which was completed in the university, of Pennsylvania, where he graduated, with distinction, at an early age, in 1790, and soon after commenced the study of the law, in the office of Joseph B. McKean. The profession of his choice did not tempt his young ambition with the splendid incentives of the British Barrister, the princely revenue and the glittering coronet, but he adopted it from inclination, and by the advice of his friends, who considered him suited to it. He was admitted to the bar in 1793, and commenced the practice of the law in Wilmington, Delaware. His practice, though he was discouraged by failure in his first efforts, after a time, became respectable, and then lucrative. If he was surpassed by some of his contemporaries in vigor and grasp and subtlety of intellect and profound erudition, they were in the first rank of the lawyers of their day. While he brought to the forum competent power

as a dialectician, with extensive knowledge of legal principles and decisions, it was in addressing a jury that he excelled. Always fluent, he could be pathetic, or delight his hearers with declamation, adorned by figures, from his prolific fancy, or by facts, from his ample store of general knowledge. So simple and unaffected was he in dress, and address, so kindly, and benevolent, and good humored, that the Court, the jury, the bar, and the bystanders listened to him with favor, and were inclined to his side of the case. Old-fashioned lawyers sometimes thought he got out of bounds. Chief justice Read, when he quoted "Beccaria on Crimes and Punishments," stopped him, saying, "that book was no authority, in his court." Invective—that terrible weapon of the orator, beneath which men of iron nerves cower, in dismay, and confusion, I will not say he could not wield, but I believe he never did wield it.

Seldom is the deep-read lawyer a polite scholar. Inured to grapple with syllogisms, and to chase subtleties through the labyrinths of legal disquisition, he disdains to frolic with the muses. Mr. Rodney, wisely, thought that an argument would not be less conclusive because clothed in elegant diction, nor less clear because illustrated by metaphor, and though he must cite black lettered reporters he might quote from the poets. He justly concluded that a man to be eminent in his peculiar pursuit must have some acquaintance, if not with all others, at least with kindred ones. His taste for elegant literature, perhaps, first awakened at the university, was sedulously cultivated in after life. His library, judiciously selected, was the largest in our State, and whoever listened to him was soon aware that it was not for show he accumulated books—to accumulate them was, indeed his passion—to love them—what is it but to delight in converse with the wise and with the good of all ages.

Mr. Rodney appeared to greatest advantage—bland, gentle and affectionate as he was—in the bosom of his family. Too often, could we follow distinguished men from the public scene of their triumphs to the hallowed precincts of domestic life, would we be pained by witnessing the jocund laugh of infancy stilled at their approach, fear paling the menial's brow, and tears on the cheeks of partners they had sworn before high heaven to love and to cherish. Too often the man who has inveighed, in the forum or Senate-house, against oppression, is the mean tyrant of his own hearth.

Mr. Rodney possessed great conversational-talent.

He talked much, not from ostentation, but because his mind was full to overflowing, and because he loved to impart pleasure. He was not one of those lovers of logomachy, who open their mouths only to do battle, nor one of those haranguers, who make mutes of all not as vain, selfish, and impudent as themselves. To the young and the diffident his manner was kind, and almost paternal, he was watchful to draw them out, and prompt to commend when they acquitted themselves well. His reading was so general that he could instruct or amuse on many subjects, and from his share in public affairs, and intimate acquaintance with statesmen of his day, during some of the most interesting periods of our history, he had a fund of valuable information. His anecdotes, of which he had ample store, were pointed, well-told, and happily introduced. Benevolence, unfeigned, so impregnated his discourse that it was difficult to listen to him and not to love him, and while listening to the wisdom and the wit of this fascinating companion the sands of life passed unheeded, and

“Day-light would in to the lattice peep”

“Ere night seemed well begun”—

“He loved to speak not of the divine attribute of power, not of Jehovah when

“Looking on the earth it quakes”

“Touching the mountains and they burn”

but of God as love, pitying the infirmities of his creatures, opening wide his hand, and filling all things living with plenteousness, and spreading his protecting-wings over his children, on the land and on the sea.

In 1791 Mr. Rodney, married Susan, daughter of John Hunn, who survived him, and they had twelve children.*

*“Aaron Burr in a letter to his daughter Theodosia, of the 17th February 1802, requests her to desire Dr. Edwards to give Mr. Alston a “line to C. A. Rodney, a very respectable young man.”—II. vol. Davis Life of A. Burr, p. 145.

In a letter, dated —to A. Burr, Mr. Rodney says “I had the pleasure of receiving yours’, of the 10th instant. The advice, you kindly give, I shall cheerfully follow. It has ever been my maxim to be moderate, but firm—*sua viter in modo, fortiter in re*”—and in a letter, dated 20th March, 1802, he informs him—“I have purchased a little tract, adjoining Dr. Tiltons, which he showed you, and have cut out abundant work for the season.”—Ibid p. 190—102.

He was at an early period of his life involved in the turmoil of politics, because then, as now, it was difficult for the eminent lawyer to avoid being a busy politician. The political contests of that period were violent. Truth candor and charity were too often immolated on the altar of party. It is a fact most honorable to Mr. Rodney that though an active and leading democrat, he numbered among his warmest friends some of the most distinguished federal leaders—for example Bayard, White, and Vining. There can be no stronger evidence of his great popularity than his election, in 1802, to the House of Representatives of the United States, by a majority of Fifteen votes over James A. Bayard, so eminent as a statesman.* It appears by his letter of December the 5th 1803 to my father, that he was then a member of the Committee of Ways and Means. On the 5th of December 1804 he was chosen, by ballot, one of the seven managers, to conduct the impeachment of Judge Chase, which, from the character of the accused, the ability it evoked, and the deep and extensive excitement of political feeling it caused, was invested with an importance and interest, which, in some measure, it still retains. What was the City of Washington at that day. It was a city of great pretention and small performance. The visitor there, for the first time, who had seen its magnificent plan, was astonished to find its avenues and streets fitted to be the thoroughfares of the busy throngs of a great emporium, partially opened, and bordered not by lofty edifices, but the stately trees of the American forest, with groups of houses, at wide intervals, which made it, in truth, no more than a collection, of villages. The President—who affected contempt for forms, which that wily leader of a great party knew full well would be lauded as republican simplicity—might be encountered, any day, on the Pennsylvania avenue, making his way through its sloughs, on his Virginia poney, and hitching it to a post, while he paid a visit.—The wings of the capitol alone were built, the gap between them being filled by a structure of boards, which gave the appearance of meanness to both. The trial of Judge Chase began on the 4th of February, 1805. The beautiful Senate-Chamber, which has that greatest merit of any work of man, suitability to its object, which its more imposing neighbor—the Hall of the House of Representa-

* 2d Hildreth's History U. S., (2d series,) p. 486.

tives—wants, was fitted up for this occasion with due regard to convenience, and some to effect. Aaron Burr presided, dignified and impartial, as was universally admitted; his hands red with the blood of Hamilton; his dark eye as piercing, and his equanimity as undisturbed as if he had not made utter shipwreck of fortune and of fame. Upon his right hand and his left sat the Senators, on benches covered with crimson cloth. The eye of the spectator, as it glanced over these statesmen, elderly, grave and dignified, dwelt longest on the men of mark; among them, for example, on our own Bayard; on John Quincy Adams, already distinguished by ability in debate, multifarious knowledge, and ungainly manners; or Pickering, with his bald head and cue, covering, as the elder Adams afterward charged,* under his puritanical garb and demeanor boundless ambition; who, retiring from office as poor as he entered it, lived on a farm of a few acres, with the simplicity of Cincinnatus, and who has left in the archives at Washington proofs of his ability as Secretary of State inferior to that of none of his successors, Webster excepted. The Representatives, most of them much younger men, were seated in front of the Senators on benches covered with green cloth. In front of the Representatives, on seats draped with blue cloth, were the Managers of the House. Among them the most prominent was John Randolph, whose failure on this occasion dimmed the splendor of his fame as a great parliamentary orator, and was poorly covered by the lame excuse that he had lost his notes. On the left of the President appeared the counsel of the accused—Harper, working as a joiner while he gained his early education, and by indomitable perseverance making his way to Nassau Hall, stood in the front rank of the lawyers of his country, and the statesmen of the federal party. Lee, Attorney General of the United States, set off his legal knowledge with the fluent speech and graceful action which distinguished the Virginians in the early periods of our history; Martin, with his profound learning and ponderous reasoning, which, *ebrius vel non ebrius*, seldom failed him; the young Hopkinson, elated by his success in the courts of Pennsylvania, and burning with ambition of fame co-extensive with the Union, and already extensively known as the author of “Hail Columbia,”†

* 2d vol. Hildreth's History U. S., (2d series,) p. 37-372.

† 2d vol. Hildreth's History of U. S. States, (2d series,) p. 208.

patriotically composed to awaken an American feeling, which might supplant the miserable devotion of the two great parties of that day to the two great belligerents of Europe. Hail Columbia, though no high place can be claimed for it as a poetical composition carries with it so many precious recollections, that it will not, I hope, be consigned to oblivion when we shall boast, as assuredly we shall, a national song equalling or surpassing the grand lyrics of Campbell. In the arrangements of the Senate-Chamber for this trial the ladies were not forgotten. They were seated in a semi-circular gallery, over the benches of the Representatives, and for the most part the wives and daughters of the most distinguished men of the nation. Among them, pre-eminent for her queenly bearing, sat Mrs. Madison, receiving, as her due, the homage paid to her bland and graceful manners rather than to her position as wife of the Secretary of State. No Senator, I am sure, looked reprovingly upon these fair ones, if in parts of this solemn trial, which they could not understand, and would not have relished, if they could, their eyes wandered to the box of the foreign ministers and their young attaches, glittering with orders and embroidery. But the object of absorbing interest was the accused. Proclamation was made that Samuel Chase appear and answer the articles of impeachment exhibited against him. When that old man, eloquent, addressed the Court denying most of the acts imputed to him, asserting the legality of those he admitted, and denying the improper motives with which the acts charged were alledged to have been done, who could forget that the sonorous voice which filled the Senate-chamber, first raised in opposition to the stamp-act, had through the whole period of the revolution, stirred his fellow-citizens, in the legislature of his native State, in their primary assemblies, and in the halls of Congress, to resist, unto death the arbitrary acts of the mother-country; who could forget that some of the ablest of the great State-papers of that Congress were from his pen; and above all who could forget that his name was signed to that immortal instrument, which proclaimed to the world that the United States, free, sovereign, and independent, had taken her place among the nations of the earth. Judge Chase was declared guilty of only three articles of the impeachment by a bare majority, unanimously acquitted of one, and found guilty of none, by a vote of two thirds, and, of course, pronounced acquitted

of all—and, I think, justly, though his ardent attachment to great principles of government, he thought endangered by factious violence, led him to touch, in his charges, on topics, forbidden by sound policy to the Judge, and conscious of great ability, and by nature overbearing, he, perhaps, exhibited on the bench somewhat of the passion and hauteur, said to have characterized many of the colonial judges.* Mr. Rodney displayed such ability and legal knowledge, as one of the managers of this impeachment as greatly augmented his reputation. In 1804, three of the four judges of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania were impeached for their (alleged) unlawful commitment for contempt of one of the parties in a libel suit pending in their court. In 1805 Mr. Rodney was employed to conduct this impeachment, which resulted in the acquittal of the accused. (2d vol. Hildreth's History of the United States (2d series,) p.p. 514, 552.)⁵ The federal party having regained its ascendancy in Delaware, he was not re-elected to the United States House of Representatives, but in 1807, he was appointed Attorney General of the United States, and held this office for four years.* The Attorney General was not a cabinet-officer until 1814; but though not a member of the cabinet, from his high place in the friendship and confidence of Jefferson and Madison he shared, I have no doubt, in the anxieties and counsels of that momentous period, when our country, constantly on the verge of war with the belligerents, who plundered her commerce, was brought to the brink of disunion by internal dissensions. I know of but one of his opinions as Attorney General, that has been questioned; that one, under which Mr. Jefferson, applying to the case a territorial law, ousted Edward Livingston from the batture, and his opinion must have been required on many nice and difficult questions which arose under the embargo and non-importation laws. In February, 1807, in the cases of Bollman and Swartwout, brought by Habeas Corpus, before the United States Supreme Court, on the questions whether they should be discharged or held for trial, and, if held, confined or bailed, Mr. Rodney, as Attorney General of the United States, appeared and made an able argument, the Court deciding that the accused should be discharged for want of probable cause for supposing them guilty.—1st vol. Burr's Trial, p. 21 to p. 30. In 1807 the mysterious movements of Aaron Burr induced his

* 2d vol. Hildreth's History of U. S. (second series,) p. 514

arrest on the Tombigbee, on the charge of treason, and his removal to Richmond, Virginia, where he arrived on the 26th of March, and on the 30th of that month, was transferred by his military escort to the civil authority and brought before Chief Justice Marshall for examination. In his trials in August and September of that year, on indictments for treason and misdemeanor, Mr. Rodney did not participate. Upon the motion that he should be committed to take his trial on the charges of misdemeanor, in setting on foot a military expedition against the dominions of the King of Spain, and of treason, in levying war against the United States, Mr. Rodney, as Attorney General argued in support of this motion. His speech is not given at large, but imperfectly by the reporter, from his own recollections, and information from others. (Burr's Trial, Preface.) But with these disadvantages it exhibits legal knowledge and ability equal to the requirements of a case so important, in which it was his painful duty to appear against an individual so distinguished, and who, he remarked, was once his friend, and received in his house as such. (1st Burr's Trial, pages 1, 8, 9, 10, 20.) I have been informed by a member of his family that he went to Richmond to take part in the preliminary proceedings in the case, but had little share in them, having been prostrated by an attack of yellow fever, soon after his arrival there.

Archibald Hamilton Rowan, then an exile from Ireland, for political opinions, for which he had been prosecuted and convicted, though ably defended by Curran in the most eloquent of his speeches, had been the guest of Mr. Rodney, having been a resident for a short time in Wilmington, or its vicinity. The intercourse between Rowan—highly educated and refined—and Mr. Rodney, under circumstances that excited his warmest sympathy, soon ripened into friendship. As soon as he heard of Mr. Rodney's illness this warm-hearted Irishman travelled, *on horseback*, to Richmond, to minister to his friend, in a disease, of the most malignant character, then generally believed to be contagious, and which has too often scared from the bed-sides of its victims their nearest relatives and their dearest friends. The Irishman has his faults—no son of Adam is without them—but was he ever found ungrateful? The following anecdote I may be pardoned for recounting, upon the same authority as the preceding one, because it illustrates a trait of Mr. Rodney's char-

acter, his antipathy to titles, of all sorts, and his scorn of the fondness of some of his countrymen for such distinctions, so inconsistent with their professed opinions :

Soon after he had taken lodgings at a hotel in Richmond, one of its waiters (a sable one, of course,) addressing him, said, "Major, will you please come to supper." "I am no Major," answered Mr. Rodney. "Colonel," replied the black, "please to come." "I am no Colonel," said Mr. Rodney, much amused with his pertinacity. The waiter then retreated, but quickly returned, and addressing him, with ten fold formality and respect, said, "General, be so good as to walk down to supper." "My friend," replied Mr. Rodney, "I am not a General." "You are," persisted the waiter, "for I heard men say in the bar-room, that you are the 'Eternal General.'" Office subjected Mr. Rodney, as it has most of our public men, to great pecuniary loss. In a letter to my father, from Washington, dated July 20th, 1807, soon after the attack of the Leopard upon the Chesapeake, he says "I have been detained here, my dear friend, much longer than I contemplated, by events as unexpected as they are unexampled. It is very uncertain when I shall get a furlough from head-quarters, though I never was so anxious to see home, because I came here unprepared for a summer's residence, after having spent the winter at this place. It is extremely inconvenient to me, at this time, to abandon, as it were, my family, and my business at the Court, for I stand in need of the profits of every term, but at such a crisis there is no personal sacrifice I would not make rather than desert my post in a perilous season." He adds the "'Triumph' and 'Bellona,' each of 74 guns still remain in the Chesapeake. In a short time Captain Decatur will give a good account of them. He has eight gun-boats complete, and in a few days he will have eight more. With this flotilla, on a calm day, he could attack and sink seventy fours." From which paragraph I infer that Mr. Rodney was a believer in one of Thomas Jefferson's hobbies and fallacies—the gun-boat system. In 1811 he resigned the office of Attorney General of the United States, probably, from prudential considerations, which the claims of his large family would no longer suffer him to disregard.

He returned to the practice of the law, in Wilmington, and must have vividly enjoyed the transition from the toils and disquietude of office to the tranquility of his happy home.

As soon as the war of 1812 was declared, he was elected Captain of a company of artillery. Beloved by his men, as he was in every situation, he was a good officer, and commanded them through that war. They volunteered their services to the United States—were accepted, discharged garrison-duty, for some time, and were encamped, for a season, being part of a body of four hundred men, who marched from Delaware, to aid in the defense of Baltimore, but were arrested before reaching it, by intelligence that they were not needed.

Careless as Mr. Rodney was of dress, his coats always having been of the cut ludicrously, but aptly, termed the *shad-belly*, his military equipment may have shocked a martinet, but if his artillery jacket was sometimes buttoned awry, it covered as brave and patriotic a heart as ever beat beneath a uniform. (10)

Mr. Rodney was a member of Washington Lodge, Wilmington, and was elected Senior Warden of the Grand Lodge of Delaware on the 24th of June, 1812.

The citizens of the United States were, from mingled motives of benevolence and interest, anxious spectators, during the long civil war between Spain and her South American colonies of that contest. The colonial policy of the great commercial nations of Europe has disgraced them by its selfishness and rapacity, and that of Spain especially. The agriculture and manufactures of her colonists were subjected to restraints almost incredible; for example, the cultivation of the olive and the vine was forbidden, in districts well suited to them. The commerce of the Spanish colonies was restricted to Spanish bottoms, and though never granted to exclusive companies, yet being confined to a single port (first Sevil and then Cadiz,) falling into a few hands, was in effect a monopoly. Even intercourse between her provinces was only partially permitted. Education was not fostered, and was confined to latin, scholastic philosophy, and jurisprudence, civil and ecclesiastical. The creoles were excluded from all offices but municipal ones; there was among them no liberty of conscience, no freedom of the press, no habeas corpus, no trial by jury, no share in legislation, and no books but those admitted by government censors. The king of Spain, not the Spanish nation, was the owner of these colonies, by virtue of a papal grant, the bull of Alexander the VIth. His will was law.—

Foreign vessels were excluded from his colonies, and intercourse with them punishable with death ; and when he relaxed this rule, as on a few occasions he did, it was for brief periods. But though he could shut out legitimate trade, and though he treated intruding foreigners, who fell into his power, with exceeding cruelty, he could not exclude the smuggler. It was, too, part of his narrow system to make this vast region a sealed book to all except Spain. But her own writers had delighted and astonished the world with narratives of the conquest of South America, and accounts of its climate, its geography, its productions and aboriginal inhabitants, truthful in general, but with the coloring of romance, and very far from possessing the accuracy of such works of our time. The royal license, but at recent periods, had opened South America to enterprising and intelligent travelers; for example, in 1790, to Alexander Von Humboldt, the result of whose journeys was given to the world in 12 volumes, illustrated with maps and drawings, a work for extent, value and accuracy of information unparalleled. Our trade with South America since 1810 had greatly augmented our knowledge of this region. In 1817 a large party of our citizens had become impatient for the acknowledgement by our government of the South America Republics. Calm and reflecting men in the minority, as they have ever been, doubted whether their citizens, misgoverned for centuries, could, in the brief period they had been left to their own guidance, have gained the knowledge and love of true political principles necessary to establish and maintain free and independent governments. To solve this doubt Mr. Monroe instituted the mission to South America, of which Mr. Rodney was the head. This appointment was most gratifying—true the duty it devolved upon him was arduous, separation from his family, was in prospect, the perils and privation of a protracted sea-voyage, and sojourn in a land of various climates, were before him, but the trust was most honorable, for he was to leave his country, not on an ordinary errand of diplomacy, but to solve the momentous problem whether millions of his fellow men deserved or not to be recognized by the United States among the independent nations of the earth. In July the Commissioners proceeded to New York, to embark in the *Ontario*, but their sailing was delayed by the illness and death of Mr. Rodney's second son, a midshipman of

that vessel, and they finally declined taking passage in her, considering her accommodations inadequate. They sailed on the 4th of December 1817, in the frigate Congress, Commodore Sinclair, from Hampton Roads. In that little world—a ship of war—there was much to interest, and instruct. He had been, for the recovery of impaired health, a voyager in early life, and ever after was an ardent admirer of our hardy mariners, and their floating abodes.— There is, perhaps, no object which awakens so many associations, dear to the philanthropist and the patriot, as that miracle of art, a ship. While she equalizes the distribution nature has made of her bounties among nations, she is the winged messenger who diffuses the precious light of knowledge among millions who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. We think, as we look upon her, anchored in some placid bay, in the language of Campbell, “of her days of toil, and her nights of danger.” Every American must remember how often she has proudly borne the flag of his country aloft in the hour of battle, and the halo of undying glory with which she has encircled our name. In this voyage Mr. Rodney’s power to attract and attach was soon manifested. Often in the delicious nights, peculiar to the tropics, while the gallant frigate glided through the ocean, which reflected the orbs that shone in glory above her, but among which no star of home sparkled, and the gleeful laugh of the frank-hearted sailor alone broke the stillness, did the officers of the Congress find in his conversation a delightful relief from the ennui of a sea-voyage. Alas! many of these young men—then so full of talent, and courage, and hope—with Sinclair, and Graham, and Bland, and Baldwin *—have long since been numbered with the dead. Having touched at Rio de Janeiro, the Commissioners arrived after a prosperous voyage, at Montevideo, from which place, the Congress having too great draught of water to ascend the La Plata further, they proceeded, in a small brig, “the Malacabada,” or “Unfinished,” by name, as ill-found and dirty a craft as ever sailed, to Buenos Ayres, where they arrived on the 28th of February, 1818, landing so unexpectedly as to defeat the public reception, with which it was intended to honor them. The “United Provinces of La Plata,” or the “Argentine Republic” then comprised about two thirds of the

* Surgeon of the Congress—a native of Wilmington, Delaware, and eminent as a botanist. H. M. Brackenrige, the able and accomplished Secretary of the Mission, afterwards a member of the U. S. House of Representatives, survives.

viceroyalty of Buenos Ayres, the area of which was about one million five hundred thousand square miles. Watered by the grand La Plata and its affluents, and other rivers, its fertile soil teemed with the productions of the temperate and torid zones. The heroic and successful repulses of the attacks of Sir Home Popham, in 1806 and of General Whitlock, in 1807, taught the inhabitants of this viceroyalty their strength, and the war consequent upon the overthrow of the ancient government of Spain by Napoleon so engrossed the parent country that she abandoned, as it seemed, her colonies, and the Argentine provinces, as much from necessity as choice assumed and exercised, in 1810, the powers of self-government, virtually independent from that year, though their independence was not formally declared till 1816. From 1810 almost till the arrival of our Commissioners they had been distracted by war with the old Spaniards, who, occupying, with armies from Peru, the upper country of the La Plata, and stained by great cruelties, strove to restore the despotism of the mother country. This war was succeeded and accompanied by contests, too often sanguinary, between two great parties of the revolutionists, one in favor of a consolidated government, adapted to the changed state of their affairs, with a chief magistrate, much like the old viceroys, the other advocating a confederacy of these provinces, like that of the United States. There were, besides, the disturbing elements of ambition and cupidity, in unprincipled men, and intense jealousy in the other provinces of the ascendancy and leadership of Buenos Ayres, to which, though it may have been unduly claimed and attained, her superior intelligence, wealth and sacrifices for the common cause gave her pretensions, plausible at least. But on the 3rd of December, 1817, a general Congress of these provinces, at first nine, then fourteen, (the additional provinces being created out of the original ones,) enacted, at Buenas Ayres, a Provisional Regulation, to be in force till a constitution should be adopted. This Regulation provided for the election of a Congress, and invested it with supreme legislative power, under wise restraints, with power to appoint a chief magistrate, to be styled Supreme Director. This provisional instrument, with great defects, has many good enactments, but is blemished by a pedantic declaration of rights and duties, which American constitution-makers take for granted none can question and therefore

never insert. The Commissioners found this provisional government subsisting, Don Manuel Puerreydon Director, and the country tranquil, with the appearance, at least, of stability. Their reception by this officer was, in Mr. Rodney's words, "kind and flattering and they received from every citizen a cordial welcome." Many were the novel and interesting objects presented by Buenos Ayres to the Commissioners—her regular and spacious streets, the Moorish style of architecture of her houses, her noble plaza, her stately cathedral and churches, with their gorgeous worship, her theatre and bull-fights, her salubrious climate, indicated by her name, the brilliant eyes and graceful carriage of her ladies, their sallow complexions, bad teeth, and cigarros, and the viaticum, born by a priest, seated in a gilded chariot, drawn by white mules, with a guard of black soldiers. Great was the embarrassment of Protestant foreigners when they encountered the host; they avoided, usually, shocking the religious feelings of the people not (as Gen. Wilkinson is said once to have done) by kneeling, which in them would have been idolatrous conformity, but by turning a corner or taking refuge in a store. Who has not heard or read of the mighty pampa stretching from Buenos Ayres, for a thousand miles, to the Andes, without hill or tree, or house, except the occasional hut of the herdsman, depressing the traveler with the painful sense of utter loneliness, and in its apparently endless undulations of verdure, well likened to the long but low swells of a great sea, arrested, in an instant, by the fiat of Omnipotence, and fixed forever. Every facility in their power was given by the director and his officials to the Commissioners in collecting the information, for which they had been sent forth by their government, and as a mark of very great respect, on their intercession, a soldier, under sentence of death for insubordination, was pardoned.* It would have been in character for some of the Roman emperors to have treated an ambassador they especially desired to honor, with a slaughter of gladiators. As if to give eclat to the departure of the commissions and their arrival in the United States, on the eve of their leaving Buenos Ayres was received intelligence of the decisive battle and victory of Maypu won by its liberating army, under San Martin, which secured the independence of Chili. The Commissioners narrowly escaping shipwreck from a pampero,

* Nile's Register, vol. 14, p. 326.

in the port of Maldonado, near the mouth of the La Plata, where the Congress had anchored, to receive bullocks, and calling at St. Salvadore and Margareta, arrived at Norfolk, after a favorable passage, in July 1818. Mr. Rodney's Report communicated to Congress in November of that year, is an able paper, and increased his reputation. Mr. Graham made a separate Report, as did Judge Bland, who with a spirit, honorable to him, proceeded, over land, from Buenos Ayres to Chili, as the instructions of the Commissioners authorized one or more of them to do. Their reports presented the Argentine Republic in less favorable aspect than did Mr. Rodney's, and they were less sanguine in their expectations of the success of the South Americans in their experiments in self-government, but this difference of their views afforded their countrymen better means for arriving at just conclusions than if they had coincided.

In 1820 Mr. Rodney was a second time elected to the United States House of Representatives, and received a respectable vote for the Speakership of that body, and in 1822 was elected by the Legislature of Delaware to the Senate of United States, being the first of his party who had received this distinction as he was the first democrat chosen to the House of Representatives.

In 1822 it was resolved by Congress that the "United Provinces of La Plata" ought to be acknowledged by the United States, and in 1823 Mr. Rodney was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to their government. The United States had the honor of preceding Mr. Canning in his recognition of the South American republics, one of the three measures on which he rested his fame as a statesman, and which was received with a burst of approbation from every quarter of Great Britain. The frigate Congress, Commodore Biddle, was ordered to carry Mr. Rodney and his family to Buenos Ayres. They were conveyed by a steamer to this ship, at anchor, near the mouth of the Christiana; an elegant dinner having been given him, a few days previous to his embarkation, by citizens of Wilmington and its vicinity, in testimony of their respect and esteem for him, at which were present Commodore Biddle, and Hugh Nelson, Minister to Spain, who was to be landed from the Congress at Cadiz. The Congress sailed from the Delaware on the 8th of June, 1823, with a fair wind, and arrived, without accident, at Cadiz, from which port, having landed Mr. Nelson, she sailed on the 3rd of August.—

While the friends of Mr. Rodney, their hopes that a sea-voyage would renovate his declining health scarcely predominating over their fears that they would see him no more, looked anxiously for news of his progress, they were astonished by intelligence that by reason of unkind and discourteous treatment, experienced from Commodore Biddle, he had left, with his family, the Congress, at Rio de Janerio, and taken passage, in a merchant vessel, for Buenos Ayres. Deep indignation was excited, and expressed. Commodore Biddle was assailed in the newspapers, and defended, with little judgement, which was his misfortune, not his fault, much stress being laid on his sacrifice of his own comfort to that of his passengers, and on the unreasonable extent of which Mr. Rodney had encumbered his ship with his furniture, the homely character of which was sneered at.— He was even reproached for lumbering the Congress with agricultural implements, which he had taken with him for the honor of our mechanics and the benefit of the Buenos Ayreans. The Legislature of Delaware, January 1st, 1824, by resolution, unanimously adopted, requested their members of Congress to use their best efforts to have an inquiry instituted as to the misconduct of Commodore Biddle. This proceeding would have been more in accordance with justice, and much more effective if, instead of assuming, on exparte evidence, as it did, the guilt of the accused, it had alledged, as was true, that there was ground for inquiry. In a biographical sketch of Mr. Rodney this occurrence could not, without injustice to his memory, be omitted, but it is with regret I mention it. I would do no wrong to the memory of an accomplished gentleman and gallant officer, and therefore from what appeared to be the facts of the case state it thus. Mr. Rodney was careless of forms to a fault, and the discomfort from having ladies and many children passengers was great, and his effects encumbered the frigate, and the Commodore, a strict disciplinarian, was fond of having things ship-shape, and, withal, of irritable temperament, while his passengers may have been too sensitive. ✕ This view palliates, but does not, in my opinion, justify the conduct of Commodore Biddle to a distinguished citizen, in feeble health, to ladies, and to children, in some sense, his guests, the character of which may be inferred from the fact that Mr. Rodney left the Congress, a thousand miles short of his destination, which he could not have done without great incon-

venience and expense. The death of Mr. Rodney and absence of Commodore Biddle delayed the inquiry, and the public mind being soon occupied by newer occurrences, though asked, it was not pressed, and there was no further proceeding in this case. Let us not forget that Biddle shared with Jones in the capture of the *Frolic*, was the captor of the *Penguin*, and by masterly seamanship saved the *Hornet* from capture, by a British 74, so close to him, at times, during the chase, as to throw her shot on his deck. His grandmother, when a British officer, tauntingly, said to her, in 1775, "the Ameicans should not make war, for they could find none to lead them," replied, "she had seven sons, whom, if necessary, she would lead, herself, against their oppressors." Two of these sons fell in the war of our revolution*—one being blown up, in command of the *Randolph* frigate, and an officer of great promise, with his crew of three hundred men, while attacking, with courage bordering on rashness, the *Yormouth* British man-of-war, of 64 guns.

Mr. Rodney presented his credentials as Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States on the 27th of December, 1823, to the governor of Buenos Ayres, who exercised, under the constitution of the Argentine Republic, adopted May 25th, 1819, the function of its Chief Magistrate. Addresses were delivered by both, and the reception was cordial and imposing.

The hopes, which Mr. Rodney shared with a great majority of his countrymen, that the South Americans would prove their capability for self-government have proved delusive. Revolutions, their history traced in characters of blood, have succeeded revolutions, in their beautiful country, military despotisms having been overthrown only that others should be erected in their stead. "Liberty"—exclaimed the lovely Madam Roland, as her ruthless murderers hurried her to the scaffold—"Liberty what crimes have been perpetrated in thy name!" I add—what follies, too, and of these none greater than political institutions in advance of the intelligence of a nation.

Mr. Rodney's health gradually declined, and on the 10th of June, 1824, at 6 o'clock, A. M., he died tranquilly, surrounded by his family. The Americans in Buenos Ayres immediately met, and passed resolutions appropriate to this mournful event. The government decreed that a sepulchral monument, to receive Mr. Rodney's re-

* Letter of Charles Biddle to A. Burr, Vol. 2d, Davitr. Life of Burr, p. 235.

mains, should be erected, at the public expense. He was interred in the English cemetery, followed by his children, his countrymen, then in Buenos Ayres, and many of its citizens, preceded by the officers, civil and military, of the Argentine Republic, its flag, with that of the United States, enshrouding the corpse, which was escorted by a military guard of honor, and minute guns, during the ceremonies, were fired from the fort, and at its close a volley from the battalion, which formed the escort. All vied in condolence with the bereaved family, and in rendering them kind offices.

On the margin of the pampa, extending, in its granduer, from the La Plata to the Andes, moulder, among strangers, the remains of CÆSAR AUGUSTUS RODNEY. I reiterate the wish, and the hope, before expressed in this Hall, that, by the act of his masonic Brethren, they may have their final resting place in Wilmington, beneath a monument, worthy his abilities, his virtues, and his public services.

Non sibi sed patriæ vixit.

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