

# THE UNION SEMINARY MAGAZINE

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## I. LITERARY.

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### EARLY RECOLLECTIONS OF JOHN RANDOLPH.

[Since the publication of my Father's sketches of Major James Morton in *The Union Seminary Magazine*, Vol. IV., No. 2, (Nov.-Dec., '92) I have been so frequently asked if among my Father's papers there were any other memoranda of the men whom he knew in his early life, that I venture to send to you for preservation in a later publication, the accompanying article, giving his "Early Recollections of John Randolph." These recollections were published in the *Central Presbyterian* in 1859, and transferred from that paper to the *Southern Literary Messenger*, then edited by John R. Thompson, Esq. (June, 1859, pp. 461-466). On p. 471 of same number and volume, Mr. Thompson makes the following editorial comment:

"We transfer to the pages of the Messenger this month from the *Central Presbyterian*, some pleasant recollections of John Randolph of Roanoke, which were contributed to that excellent paper by one who knew the gifted and eccentric orator and politician. As contributions to a work as yet unwritten, a full and impartial biography of one of the most remarkable men of his time, these sketches have a permanent value and it is with the view of placing them within ready access, as well as of presenting them to our readers, many of whom do not see the *Central Presbyterian*, that we surrender the space for their insertion to the exclusion of original material. It is a part of the Messenger's mission, which we never overlooked, to garner up all that relates to the past history of Virginia in the lives of her distinguished citizens, and thus give to the whole series of the Magazine a significance not possessed by periodicals devoted entirely to the literature of the day."

I take it, that it is also the mission of the *Seminary Magazine* as of the famed journal from which the extract is taken, "to garner up all that relates to the past history of Virginia in the lives of her distinguished citizens, and thus give to the whole series of the Magazine a significance not possessed by periodicals devoted entirely to the literature of the day." And specially to do this with reference to all that concerns the

home of the Seminary in Prince Edward, and all that affects the Presbyterian Church.

It should be added that these sketches were written and published, unsigned by my Father's name, and hence his allusions to his Father and brother were as those of any pupil in the celebrated school at Ararat.

Norfolk, Va., Sept. 6, 1893.

WM. S. LACY.

It was one of Oberlin's wise maxims that "nothing should be destroyed, nothing thrown away or wasted;"—taking it, as he tells us, from the direction of Christ to his disciples, after feeding the five thousand: "Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." I propose to gather up a few fragments from my early recollections of one of the most remarkable men I ever knew, and if not useful in the mere utilitarian sense of the term, they may, I hope, serve to beguile the time of some reader who might be worse employed. There is no knowledge, however vain in itself, and however little it may be worth the pains of acquiring, which may not at some time or other be turned to account.

About the year 1800, a "grammar school"—as they used to be called—was established by the Rev. Drury Lacy, of precious memory, at Ararat, in Prince Edward County, Va. This school was kept up by its founder until his death in 1815, and was continued for several years afterwards by his eldest son, now Rev. Wm. S. Lacy, of Arkansas. During a period of its existence, instead of being merely preparatory, as it only professed to be, it became actually the rival of Hampden-Sidney College, in the neighborhood of which it was located. For many years of my life I was a member of this school, and during the time that Mr. Wm. Lacy was principal, had frequent opportunities of seeing Mr. Randolph. Mr. Lacy, before the death of his father, had studied law under Judge Beverly Tucker, the neighbour and half-brother of Mr. Randolph, and whilst in that family, became very intimate with him, and a mutual attachment was formed, which continued to the close of Mr. Randolph's life. On the death of his father Mr. Lacy abandoned law and took charge of the school at Ararat, where Mr. Randolph sent his three wards—John Randolph Clay, John Rondo'ph Bryan, and Thomas Bryan, to be taught the "classics." The widow of his brother Richard still resided at Bizarre, only two miles distant, whom he loved tenderly and often visited. These circumstances united, brought him to Prince Edward and kept him in this neighbor-

hood much of the time when he was not in Washington.

It was Mr. Lacy's custom to hear his boys recite their Latin and Greek grammar lessons before breakfast, and I have known Mr. Randolph, more than once, to come from Bizarre and enter the schoolhouse by sunup. At 9 o'clock the school was *formally* opened, when all the boys read verses about in the Bible, until the chapter or portion was finished. Mr. Randolph always seemed highly pleased with this exercise, read *his* verse in turn, and with Mr. Lacy would sometimes ask questions. On one occasion while reading one of the books of the Pentateuch, he stopped a lad with the question: "Tom Miller, can you tell me who was Moses' father?"—"Jethro, sir," was the prompt answer. "Why, you little dog, Jethro was his father-in-law." Then putting the question to four or five others by name, not one of whom could answer, he berated them soundly for their carelessness and inattention in reading, saying, "when you were reading last week, William Cook read the verse containing the name of Moses' father, and have you all forgotten it already?" Just then a young man caught the name, and unable to repeat the verse of the Bible, repeated a part of a line from Milton—

"The potent rod of Amram's son," &c.

"Ah," said Mr. Randolph, "that is the way you learn your Bible—get it out of other books—what little you know of it"—and with an exceedingly solemn manner and tone, added, "and so it is with us all, and a terrible proof of our deep depravity it is, that we can relish and remember anything better than THE BOOK." The very utterance, simple as it was, filled every one with awe, and made him feel guilty, whilst at the same time it imparted a reverence for the Bible which was never felt before, and which from one mind at least never will be effaced. Mr. Randolph was so pleased, however, with the young man who quoted from his favorite author, that in a short time—as soon perhaps as he could get it from Richmond, he presented him with a beautiful copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, with a suitable inscription in his own elegant handwriting.

Another of the customs in the school at Ararat, was to review every Friday forenoon, the studies of the preceding days, and spend the afternoon in spelling, in which the whole school took part—in reading select passages from the Bible, the *Spectator*, Shakspeare or Milton, and in *declamation*. The first exercise, spelling, afforded great amusement occasionally.

Mr. Randolph would always take the *foot*, and usually got to the *head* pretty soon, when he would leave the circle and take his seat. On one or two occasions however, he was kept at the *foot* until the exercise was closed, much to the gratification of some of the smaller lads who had been stimulated to prepare the two columns of the Dictionary (Walker's) with perfect accuracy.

In reading too, he would take his turn, and after a trial of a given selection had been made by two or three boys he would take the book and *show* them how it ought to be read. Mr. Randolph was wonderfully gifted by nature with an ear that could detect the slightest shades of tone, with a voice that was music itself, and with a taste that was as faultless as I can conceive. The modulations and intonations of his voice, the pause, accent, emphasis were altogether wonderful. I have felt it myself, and have seen other boys who, when he was reading, actually seemed to doubt if it was the same piece they had read but a few minutes before. Indeed, his reading seemed to shed a flood of light over the passage and give to it a meaning which had never occurred to you before. I love music, and love it dearly—far too much for my good I sometimes fear; but if the choice were given me to attend the best arranged musical festival this country could get up, or to hear Mr. Randolph read an hour from the Bible and Shakspeare, it would not take a second to decide. As to *declamation*, he never seemed to take much interest in it, holding to the belief that a man or boy, if he had anything to say, could say it. He used to quote to Mr. Lacy on this subject, a couplet from Hudibras—

All a rhetorician's rules  
Teach him but to name his tools.

And nothing but his profound reverence for old customs, *antiquity*, as I have often thought, could induce him to tolerate the practice of declamation in schools. I never knew him, in a single instance, to show how this ought to be done. Once when a little fellow, intending to place his hand on his heart, put it too low down, Mr. Randolph gave a hearty laugh, suiting a remark to the gesture.

During recess or playtime, as we used to call it, Mr. Randolph would sometimes take part in the sport of the boys, and engage in them with the greatest interest. The games then most common were, *bandy*, *chunney*, *cat* and *marbles*, with all

its variations of long taw, short taw and knucks. I know Congressmen now-a-days, who would think it beneath their dignity to play marbles, though some of them are men, "whose fathers" Mr. Randolph "would have disdained to set with the dogs of his flocks." But I have played marbles with him and Judge Tucker many a time, and have had my knucks stung badly too by both of them.

Usually he was very cheerful and communicative, and at dinner told many interesting anecdotes of George Mason, Edmund Pendleton, Patrick Henry, Nathaniel Macon, John Marshall and other celebrities; or would talk about his visit to England, describing the parks and dwellings of such and such noblemen with a particularity of detail that always deepened the interest, especially when he came to the stud of horses or the kennel of fox-hounds; his visit to Oxford with its city of colleges, his dining with one Professor, taking breakfast with another, and telling all about what was on the table; how the servants dressed, the different kinds of gowns and caps of the masters and students in the different colleges; his purchasing his famous horse, Gascoigne, from a nobleman of the same name, for one hundred *English* guineas, when he was only a "yearling last grass." On another day he would tell the boys at the table—for in good old times we always sat an hour at table whether we had finished eating or not—of some wonderful feat of his own, in walking so many miles when but seventeen years of age; or in later years how many partridges he had bagged in such a hunt, beating Blake Woodson, a famous shot, and old Charner, his brother, beating Mr. Egglestone, and old William Randolph, John Miller, Theodore Dudley, both the Trents—and becoming animated he would say, "Yes boys, and I beat black David Copeland all hollow—beat him blacker than he is—killed two birds to his one." These were glorious times to us boys.

On one occasion only, do I remember his being gloomy and morose and crabbed, and then it was bad enough. Shortly after he arrived at Ararat on that visit, a long spell of cold, rainy weather set in—the wind blowing from northeast kept him in doors a week or more. He would read and write and loll on the couch 'till he was tired, and then become the most restless and fretful mortal I ever saw. From one o'clock 'till bed-time he would drink rum-toddy and whiskey-grog enough to make any other man dead drunk, though he was never at

all fuddled. All we could do was to keep out of his way and let him alone. As soon, however, as the wind changed and the weather cleared off he was as gay and lively as ever.

There was nothing remarkable about his eating. His breakfast was usually green tea and toast, with an egg, or a very small piece of salt fish. Sometimes, instead of the toast, he would take batter-cakes or hominy. At dinner he ate very heartily when he was well, and if there was any dish specially plain, such as *jole* and *turnip greens* he would eat nothing else except the corn and dumplings that had been boiled in the in the same pot. He never spoke of corn-bread and wheat-bread, but invariably called the former *Indian-bread* and the latter *English-bread*. He rarely, if ever, touched a dessert, and never, if it was made of English pastry. I have been often amazed at the quantity of liquor he would drink at dinner and all the afternoon, and yet I never saw him affected by it in the slightest degree. His supper was lighter than his breakfast.

Far more has been written, and is known of Mr. Randolph's public than of his private and domestic life, and for this reason I offered my recollections of him in a family and school-house. There are some circumstances connected with his public life which I do not recollect ever to have seen in print, that may be worth knowing. These I will proceed to give in the present communication. I wish, however, before doing so to relate an anecdote, illustrative of the astonishing accuracy of his memory, and his intimate acquaintance with the Latin classics. During the time of which I have been speaking, that is, whilst I was a pupil in Mr. William Lacy's school at Ararat, there was some public gathering on Saturday at Prince Edward Court house, and in the afternoon of that day, when most of the crowd had dispersed, several gentlemen remained 'till the mail was opened, and to take advantage of the cool of the day in going home. Among these were, besides Mr. Randolph, Henry E. Watkins, William Berkeley, James Henderson Fitzgerald, Dr. William S. Morton, and several others. These were gathered around Mr. Randolph on the steps that passed over into the Court house yard, under the deep shade of the noble old elms with which the grounds were planted, listening to him reading one of the celebrated political disquisitions, furnished to the Richmond Enquirer by Senator Giles, afterwards Governor of Virginia. The subject discuss-

ed with so much ability in the article then reading, was, the causes that operated on the prosperity of the Commonwealth, and that gave it a retrograde, rather than progressive movement, compared with such states as New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio. In the full tide of the eloquent discussion, Mr. Giles had quoted a passage from the Catiline War of Sallust, which was so apt and appropriate that it called forth at once the admiration of some of the gentlemen. "Yes," said Mr. Randolph, "it is admirable, and peculiarly appropriate, but then it is not correct. The great disquisitor has altered the sentence to suit his purpose." Captain Watkins questioned the statement, and examining the quotation, declared "it was good Latin and just in Sallust's style." "True" said Mr. Randolph "it is good Latin, but it is not Sallust's Latin." And taking out his pencil wrote on the margin of the newspaper what he regarded as the true reading of Sallust\*—and reading it off as he had corrected it—"Here, gentlemen, is the language that Sallust uses *in usum Delphini*, and I'll bet my Betsy Robertson (his riding mare) against the sorriest gelding on the ground, I am right and Mr. Giles is wrong." Nobody of course took him up. That night Mr. Randolph and Mr. Fitzgerald accompanied Mr. Lacy to Ararat. At supper when all seemed to have forgotten what had occurred at the Court-House, Mr Randolph turned to the little brother of Mr. Lacy and said, "go and bring me every copy of Sallust you can find." In a short time the little fellow came staggering in with his armful, and as the furniture of the table was taken off, the books were thrown upon it. "Now hand me the edition I want, *in usum Delphini* mind you—I'll have nothing to do with your Yankee contrivances with English notes. Mr. Lacy, did you ever see a Yankee who knew anything about the classics?—that make dunces and blockheads out of smart boys, and cheat them out of their time and money. Here it is, I told you so, I am right, the old disquisitor wrong." On comparing what he had written on the margin of the paper with the passage in Sallust, it was found to be strictly accurate, not merely in the collocation of the words, but in every mark, even to a comma.

The first time I ever heard Mr. Randolph make a speech, was several years before the occurrence first stated. My

\**Sallustie Catilina*—53. Sed. post quam luxu atque desidia civitas corrupta est, &c.

father took me on horse-back *behind* him, when I was only ten or eleven years old, more to *see* Mr. Randolph than to hear him. It was a time when politics were running high; when the effort that succeeded was made to turn Mr. Randolph out of his seat in Congress. The crowd was immense, for the people flocked from every county in the Congressional district to hear the discussion between him and Mr. Eppes. I remember Mr. Eppes, it is true, and was struck with his appearance as a polished gentleman, who figured a gold-headed cane, the first that my childish eyes had ever beheld. But his speech made no impression on me, or if it did, has long since been entirely forgotten. Mr. Randolph was the man I went to see, and I saw him and heard him too. Much of his speech I remember to this day, though it has been more than forty-five years ago. The part I now notice for the sake of showing his mode of reasoning is this: He was defending himself against the charge that his opposition to the war with England was so great that even after it had commenced and was going on he voted against an appropriation—the amount I forget—to build forts, etc., to protect the coast. In his defence, he began at St. Croix river on the north, and went to St. Mary's on the south, then the boundary between the United States and the Spanish Province of Florida, describing every light, headland and indenture on the coast, every river, creek, inlet and bay, every harbour as if he had actually measured its depth himself with such minuteness and accuracy of detail as filled me with amazement, who had just studied Geography and thought I knew all about our country at least. Then calling out to one of the old patriarchs, his firm and fast friend, he said: "Capt. Price, turn round a moment—how many acres are in that old field?" "Between one hundred and one hundred and fifty, I presume," was the prompt reply. "Now, tell me, Nat. Price, here before all your neighbors, can you enclose that old field with ten panels of fence?" "No-no-no-, indeed," rung out from a hundred voices. "And yet I am to be turned out of office because I will not waste your money to do what can no more be done than Nat. Price can enclose this old field with ten panels of fence!!" The solemn pause, the long steady gaze on the people from an eye of flashing indignation at the treatment he had received, made an impression on my memory that will never be effaced. Such an argument was easily understood and to his *friends* was perfectly convincing.

Although I had frequent opportunities of hearing Mr. Randolph speak after this, and the recollection of many of them is yet fresh in my mind, still to avoid prolixity I adduce but two other statements—the one to illustrate his remarkable quickness and readiness in applying the merest incident to his purpose with great effect; the other to illustrate the mingled and opposite feelings of his audience under the power of his speaking.

I do not now remember the subject or the occasion of discourse connected with the incident I am about to state, nor is it important to the illustration. He was, at the time alluded to, speaking with calmness and earnestness too, deeply absorbed in his subject, and, from the quiet and fixed attention of the people they were deeply interested also. He was in the act of stating that if certain things were done, “such an event would follow as inevitably”—and casting up his eye as if to seize upon some appropriate illustration, a leaf from the tree over him came twittering down before his face, and following it with his finger in its fall to the ground he added, “as the power of gravitation.” If he had studied a month for an illustration to suit his purpose precisely, he could not have selected one more appropriate. It seemed to strike every one with an agreeable surprise. This, however, is only one out of scores of similar incidents.

The last time I ever heard him speak was in the spring of 1828 or 1829, I forget which. The great contest had been waged in Congress during the preceding session between the parties respectively of Adams and Jackson, when Mr. Randolph made his celebrated speech in favour of the latter, although the subject before Congress was on the resolution of a gentleman from Kentucky, *to retrench the expenditures of the general government*. This will fix the date if any one chooses to look up his files of papers for the purpose. Mr. Randolph had sent from Washington City before his return, a circular to his constituents declining a reelection, and avowing his desire to return to private life. After Congress adjourned he came home in feeble health, with depressed spirits and looking very badly. His constituents, however, would not hear of his giving up the public service. On his reaching Prince Edward Court-House, his old friends came crowding around him, as usual, not only to welcome him back, but to importune him to abandon his purpose of retiring. He was at last prevailed

upon to speak to the people, and give an account of the public affairs at Washington, if nothing more. On ascending the *steps* he was assisted by his faithful and devoted personal friends, John James Flourney and Samuel C. Anderson. He looked pale, emaciated and dejected. Every eye was fixed upon him, every whisper hushed. Leaning upon his cane for support, he surveyed the crowd with a look of unutterable tenderness and deep solemnity, and said—"Fellow citizens!—I am an old man and worn out, grown old and worn out in your service. Two and thirty years—with the exception of a single term—have I served you to the best of my poor abilities. These thirty years make sad changes in a man. When I first was honoured with your confidence, I was a very young man, and your fathers stood almost in parental relation to me, and I received from them the indulgence of a beloved son. But the old patriarchs of that day have been gathered to their fathers. Some adults remain whom I look upon as my brethren, here they are clustering around me to-day. But the greater part were children—little children—or have come into the world since my public life began. I know your grandfathers and men muster-free, who were boys at school when I first took my seat in Congress. Time, the mighty reformer and innovator, has silently and slowly, but surely, changed the relation between us; and I now stand to you *in loco parentis*, in the place of a father, and receive from you this day a truly filial reverence and regard. Yes, you are my children, who have ever resented, with the quick love of children, all my wrongs, real or supposed. I have come back to spend my last days among you, to retire to my old patrimonial oaks, where I may see the sun rise and set in peace; and when God's time comes to lay my body down to rest in the bosom of my dear, blessed mother, this venerated commonwealth, whose unworthy son I am."

It would be impossible to describe the effects of this *exordium* upon the people. Perhaps there was not a dry eye in all the crowd, while many a hard-visaged old planter had his sunburnt face all bathed in tears, and his whole frame convulsed with emotion. Of course I do not pretend to quote the very words of Mr. Randolph, but only give the substance. His voice, soft, mellow, and rich as the lower tones of a flute, was distinctly heard by the most distant, while he uttered every word and syllable slowly, earnestly, solemnly, without removing his hands from his cane, or making a single gesture.