

John Randolph to Andrew Jackson, March 18, 1832, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

JOHN RANDOLPH TO JACKSON.

Roanoke, March 18, 1832.

My dear Sir, I perceive by the newspapers that Mr Rives¹ comes home next Autumn. This and the recall of Mr Van Buren by the infamous coalition between Calhoun and Hayne with Clay and Webster, leaves two vacancies in our diplomacy, the most desirable of any in your gift.

1 William C. Rives of Virginia, minister to France since 1829.

As both of us have been most unjustly and, in my case, *cruelly* censured and calumniated about my outfit, which, *by right*, ought to have been in my pocket when I sailed from Hampton Roads, if not sooner (for from the adjournment of the convention until April, I held myself at the disposal of the Department of State,) only begging “not to be sent in February on account of the cold weather”, but absolutely “*protesting* against being sent to sea or being at sea in the month of *July* because I dreaded the Summer climate of Russia more than it's winter”.

Now, Sir, If Mr Middleton's son had not married the daughter of Mr John P. Van Ness, who from a bitter *personal* as well as political enemy of the Secretary of State, Mr Van Buren, had become his warm partisan and supporter, because of his, V. B's, patronage and supposed influence with you; I would have been as I ought to have been in St. Petersburg about the time that I left Hampton Roads; in which case I should have left Russia when the news of the *three* days of July reached St. Petersburg and I should

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have come home with a Treaty in my pocket, or have sent it to you by a special Courier leaving Clay Chargé d'Affaires. But the delay interposed by the pitiful Intrigue to save Middleton's feelings blew up all hopes of success. I had not been presented to their Imperial and Royal Majesties before the news from Paris was received. The truth is, that if I had known when I was in the North Sea of what was going on in France, I never should have seen the Waters of the Baltic. I should have caused myself to be put ashore on the coast of Scotland, or at the mouth of the Elbe and remained in Europe to watch events.

To return to Russia is impossible. It would be suicide. But after the entire failure of my negotiation by the delay brought about by the Intrigues of Van Ness and I am forced to add of Van Buren also (against whom, nevertheless, I have no *personal* ill feeling), the French revolution of July 1830 being followed up by the *Cholera Morbus* and the Polish Insurrection treading close upon the heels of that Turkish Plague (for such it is in fact, but not in name) all hopes of doing any thing with the Autocrat, or the Imperial ministry vanished, and Mr Buchanan will go upon a "sleeveless errand".

But Sir if I had the strength of Sampson and the constitution of the Imperial Tyger that now sits on the tottering throne of the *Czars* I could not endure to be at a Court where I must smother my indignation at the infernal Tyranny which the Autocrats fears² causes him to practice against the brave but unfortunate Poles. Chlopicki for example—knouted, branded and sent to work under ground for *life* , in Siberia.

² In the margin is written, "Fear is always cruel".

Sir I do most heartily repent me of my timidity (the effect of disease) in not strenuously advising *you* to interfere in behalf of the gallant, heroic but betrayed and abandoned Poles; and I do hope that, by this time, Louis Philip's head is in the sack of the Executioner and that France will once more precipitate herself upon Germany and Italy and upon the Austrian and Russian Barbarians; that the wrongs and Blood of Poland, which cries from the earth for Vengeance, will produce a rich harvest; and that the Barbarians, whether

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Austrian or Tartar, may be once more “driven back to their frightful climates”, where but for Buonaparte's presumptuous rashness they would now be.

You Sir might have add[ed] imperishable renown to your fame by sending the very squadron of which the Concord [?] formed a part into the Baltic and enforcing at Dantzic and Memel the hollow neutrality of Prussia. Would to God that I had such a chance of immortality. Your fame is now American almost exclusively. You might have a renown in the 3 other quarters of the world equally great, and in your place I would have it.

The infamous conduct of Calhoun and his wretched creatures has damned him and them everlastingly in Virginia, Penna. and N. York, and in the west also. Clay has “trained off”, He has cut his throat with his own Tongue. John Q. is the best of the set and I would vote for him as your successor in preference to any named nag, if he was not such a mean creature.

Van Buren cannot be president. I told Ritchie of the Enquirer (who is a double faced villain that will not outlive the year, politically) as I was on my way to Russia that neither Calhoun, Van Buren, or Clay could ever be President. Van is the best of the set but he is too great an intriguer and besides wants personal dignity and weight of character. He is an adroit, dapper, little managing man, but he can't inspire respect, much less *veneration*. He is very well in his place—not where he now is, because the English are the most fastidious people on earth. You may talk as much nonsense as you please, but you must not betray a want [of] education.

Now Van Buren cannot speak, or write the English Language correctly, and I can see the eyebrows of the fashionable raised at his false pronunciation. He always says “consitherable”, for considerable etc: etc: A single substitution of will for shall, or a single false quantity would blow him up. For either of these embassies I offer you my services. For that of England I am more fit than any man I know, unless perhaps Mr Gallatin. For that and a popular assembly or a publick meeting I am particularly well qualified. You must

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not send needy people abroad but especially to England. Your minister there must give as well as receive dinners. I ask no outfit—let the one I have serve, and I will go [and] stay out my two three or four years. Don't mistake me, I am not asking for office. I scorn it and spurn the Idea; but I happen to know that from my perfect and most minute knowledge of England and of the intermarriages etc. of all her great and small people³ who have influence,

³ In the margin is written: “McLane and his Lady made dreadful mistakes for want of this knowledge. He too is illiterate and needy. V. B on the contrary is easy in his circumstances.”

that I can succeed where any other man in the U. S must fail; except perhaps Mr Gallatin; and the English will forever look upon him as a Frenchman, which will do him no good at the Court of London, although it does fit him better for any of the Continental courts than any other man in America, unless Livingston for France. Again I say Sir, that I am not asking Office at your hands, although I am very desirous to fill the place for a short time at least; for reasons that I shall communicate to you in a few days, personally.

I am slowly recovering from the severest fit of gout first in one leg, the right, and then in the other, that I ever saw any man suffer under except my maternal grandfather Theoderick Bland of Cawsons Esquire. He was a very superiour man to his elder brother Richard of Jourdain's Point who was in the first Congress (1774) and died soon after Peyton Randolph the first President, or to my uncle (his only son[)] Doctor (or Colonel) Bland of the old Congress in 1780–1781,⁴ and who commanded the guard over the Convention troops at Charlottesville (Burgoyne's army) in 1779–80 *which nearly ruined him* , for he was proud and magnificent.

⁴ Dr. Theodorick Bland was a member of the Continental Congress from 1780 to 1783.

But I must stop. I have something of the most vital importance to communicate which I dare not trust to paper. I shall therefore cause myself to be put into my chariot and taken to

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the Steam Boat at Potowmack creek as soon as this Antarctic weather shall relent, which must be in a day or two. Before yourself I shall lay *facts* and leave you to draw your own conclusions. No body that I know is more capable than yourself of deciding correctly—indeed no one as capable.

Of your re-election there can be no doubt but it will be to rule over a dismembered Empire. A mine is ready to explode under you. Excuse my abruptness, it is the effect of weakness not of arrogance. You have been but too pacific. Let the fools and knaves in the two Houses of Congress disband and then strike at Cuba. It will give vent and profitable employment for all our now burthensome slaves. It will strengthen the *great slave holding Interest*. We shall have at the least every thing south of James River with the naval depot at Norfolk. I say *we* for, with Earl Grey, if the struggle does begin (as I happen to know it will unless you avert it by a prompt redress of our intolerable wrongs) “I shall stand by my order.” It is Slavery versus Anti-Slavery: and if the Fanatics and Fools in England drive matters over hard with Jamaica, she will be glad to throw herself under our protection. With the Havannah and the Bay of Tampa, the only port in the Gulf of Mexico capable of receiving a first rate line of Battle Ship, we have a Slip-knot around the throat of the Mississippi and we can strangle the Commerce of the “*Free States*” northwest of the river Ohio, if those States give us any annoyance.

To England, who will not object to our holding Cuba, we will give the monopoly of our carrying trade. If any body had predicted in 1776 and had been believed that in two years after declaring Independence we should have been fighting side by side with *Frenchmen* against old England, Independence never would have been declared. Washington would have remembered Fort Du Quesne and the bloody field of Braddock, and made the best terms he could with Lord North.⁵

⁵ In the margin is written the following: “If I had a seat in the H. of R. I would move an impeachment against the Ch. J. and Story. Their *motives* are nothing to me, and Thompson”

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Nations, like men, can be governed only by *Interest* ; and the Slave Interest has the knife at its throat in the hands of Fanatics and rogues and Fools and we *must* and *shall* and *will* defend ourselves. If the storm blows over I go to England in June, I cannot stand this climate. But if as I believe and *fear* this Rope of Sand, miscalled the federal Government, shall go to pieces before the end of May, I may yet die in harness, with spurs on (as I always desired to do) instead of snivelling my life away on a bed like a breeding woman. For I am resolute not to assist in the subjugation of South Carolina but, if she does move (as I fear she will) to make common cause with her against the usurpations of the Federal Govt. and of the Supreme Court especially. The late infamous decision of those minions of arbitrary power will give us Georgia. Every thing south of Ohio, except perhaps Kentucky and the Western District of Virginia, must be with us. With this noble country and Cuba, where we can make a hogshead of Sugar as easily as a pound can be grown on the Mississippi or in Florida, we shall have a vast empire capable of indefinite improvement and of supporting easily forty millions of people.

I shall go to England as I said before whether I receive the appointment of Envoy or not, unless S. C. shall strike as I dread she will.

I am dear Sir most faithfully yours

[P. S.] Do not suppose that I disparage Mr V. Buren. He wants nothing but education (for his abilities are of the first order) to fit him for the mission to England. He is not like Gallatin or Livingston⁶ bien instruit, but give him time to collect the requisite information, and no man can produce an abler argument than V. B

⁶ In the margin is written, "Livingston is the very man to succeed Rives".