

THE MECKLENBURG DECLARATION.

Rev. Dr. A. W. Miller Replies to Recent Criticisms

To the Editor of the NEWS.

President Shearer, of Davidson College, refers to me the inquiry of an Alabama Professor: "Can the statement in this clipping be true, asserting that the Mecklenburg Declaration has been proved to be a myth?" The clipping is from *The New York Evangelist*, of December 18, 1890, but copied from another Paper. A distinguished Divine, of Washington City, formerly, the editor of the *Evangelist*, sends me the same clipping, "to which", he says "you may wish to make a reply". He adds: "It is from the Miscellany of *The Evangelist*, made up by some one for that Paper, copied from another Paper, of which I know nothing; and published in *The Evangelist*, without, I believe, the Knowledge of the editor." The clipping reads thus: "The charge of plagiarism is often made without foundation, and has often needlessly embittered the lives of celebrated writers. Among those who have thus suffered was Thomas Jefferson. The last seven years of his life were troubled with attacks of various sorts, among them the charge that he pilfered the sentiment, and some of the Passages, of his draft of The Declaration of Independence, from a similar Declaration made by the citizens of Mecklenburgh, North Carolina, fourteen months before; and that when he was confronted by a copy of these earlier Declarations, he denied that he had ever seen or heard of it. This position he maintained to his dying day; and after his decease, the discussion as to the genuineness of the Mecklenburg Declaration of May 20, 1775, was kept up by his political friends and opponents. If it were a genuine document, the resemblance between the two Declarations was so marked, that there appeared to be no escape from the inference that Jefferson was chargeable with both plagiarism and untruthfulness. Historical writers have generally mentioned and passively admitted the genuineness of The Mecklenburgh Declaration, without raising the question of its authenticity. The historians of North Carolina have uniformly extolled it as the most illustrious incident in their State annals. Wheeler, in his *Historical Sketches of North Carolina*, says: "This important Paper is dear to every North Carolinian. The 20th of May is a sacred festival within its borders; and efforts are being made to erect in the place, where the event occurred, a Monument to perpetuate its memory."

Since the death of Mr. Jefferson documents have come to light, which prove, beyond a doubt, that the Mecklenburg Declaration of May 20, 1775, is a myth. It is as singular fact, however, that in these developments no evidence appears of intentional fraud on the part of any person; and it is evident that the paper was composed, (perhaps as an exercise, or a reverie,) after Mr. Jefferson's Declaration, of July 4, 1776, had been printed, and that the writer adopted Mr. Jefferson's ideas and some of his expressions. That it was not intended as a deception, seems probable from the fact that no public use was made of it

during the life of the writer.” “Since the death of Mr. Jefferson, documents have come to light, which prove, beyond a doubt, that The Mecklenburgh Declaration of May 20, 1775 is a myth.”

PRODUCE THEM!

Why any subsequent discussion, if, long ago, it was “proved a myth”? How “beyond a doubt”, if “the myth” be not acknowledged, but disowned, by those best acquainted with the subject? The statement is false, and the “explanation,” exculpating the Mecklenburgh writer, ridiculous. The true issue cannot be evaded: Either, the Men of Mecklenburg were plagiarists, or Thomas Jefferson was a plagiarist.

And so, John Adams and Charles Francis Adams rightly judged. John Adams says: “Either these Resolutions are a plagiarism from Mr. Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence, or Mr. Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence is plagiarism from those Resolutions. I could as soon believe that the dozen flowers of the Hydranged, now before my eyes, were the work of chance, as that the Mecklenburgh Resolutions and Mr. Jefferson’s Declaration were not derived, the one from the other.”

The Works of John Adams, Boston 1856.

These works contain, also, “The Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations, by his Grandson, the Charles Francis Adams”. The latter, treating of the Mecklenburgh Declaration, says: “No historical fact is better established.”

Wheeler’s Reminiscences states:

“A writer in the New York Review, reviewing The Life of Jefferson, by Tucker, clearly shows that the preamble to The Bill of Rights, The Mecklenburg Declaration, and the Virginia Bill of Rights, contain nearly everything of importance in The Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, upon which rests so much of Mr. Jefferson’s fame. Of this latter instrument, and The Mecklenburg Declaration, Judge Tucker says: “Every one must be persuaded, at least all who have been minute observers of style, that one of these Papers had borrowed from the other.”

That noted Antiquarian of South Carolina, a Ruling elder in one of my South Carolina churches, Daniel Greene Stinson, Esq., informed me that he was well acquainted with John McKnitt Alexander, Secretary of the Mecklenburg Convention, who stated to him that he had taken a copy of the Declaration to Philadelphia, and showed it to members of The Congress; among them, to Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, the latter of whom expressed his approbation of the act.

Many “documents” present the character of Jefferson, - Infidel and Scoffer at Christianity, in no favorable light. Sparks’s Life of Washington, says: “There can be no doubt that Washington’s feelings were wounded by some parts of Mr. Jefferson’s conduct, as well as by conversations which were reported to him as having been held at

Monticello. He had reposed unlimited confidence in Mr. Jefferson, and shown towards him at all times a sincere and unwavering attachment; and he was not prepared to receive the returns of ingratitude and disrespect, which these conversations seemed to imply. The famous letter to Mazzei, however it may be explained, could not have been read by Washington without pain. The unqualified censure of the Administration, which it contained, necessary included him as the head of the Administration. After he retired from the Presidency, an insidious letter was sent to him through the post-office, the object of which was to draw from him political remarks and opinions. It was accidentally discovered, that this letter was subscribed with a fictitious signature, and that it came from a person, who resided near Mr. Jefferson, associated intimately with him, and participated in his political sentiments. It was not ascertained, nor perhaps fully believed, that Mr. Jefferson was accessory to this proceeding; but circumstances were such as to make strong impression upon the mind of Washington. It is also remarkable, that, while Mr. Jefferson was Vice-President, although he passed near Mount Vernon, in his journeys between Monticello and Philadelphia, to attend Congress at two regular sessions, and one extra session before Washington's death, he never paid him a visit, nor saw him after time of Mr. Adam's inauguration."

After suggesting some possible palliating circumstances, the historian adds: "But, after all, it is not easy to be convinced, even by his own statement that he is not, in some degree, chargeable with delinquency towards him during the latter years of his life."

Patrick Henry also, as well as Washington, was the object of Jefferson's malice. William Wirt Henry, esq., in Dawson's Historical Magazine, December 1867, vindicates his illustrious grandfather from the slanders of Jefferson. One was that Mr. Henry was "a very inefficient member of deliberative bodies and had not accuracy enough of idea in his head to draw a bill on the most simple subject which would bear legal criticism." This is refuted by the fact of his being placed, frequently, on important committees. The able George Mason testifies: "His eloquence is the smallest part of his merit. He is in my opinion, the first man upon this continent, as well in abilities as publick virtues; and had he lived in Rome about the time of the first Punick War, when the Roman people had arrived at their meridian glory, and their virtue not tarnished, Mr. Henry's talents must have put him at the head of that glorious Commonwealth." Jefferson asserted that Mr. Henry was, at one time, a barkeeper. This is denied by Mr. Wirt, who obtained his information from the companions of Mr. Henry's youth. Jefferson represented him as "too lazy to acquire or practice law, also requiring large fees for his services insatiable in money, and doing so like business in the General Court other than criminal, that it would not pay the expenses of his attendance. This falsehood is refuted by Mr. Henry's Fee Books, which shew that, from the first of September, 1760, to the last of December, 1763, Mr. Henry was engaged in 1,185 suits; and so far from being insatiable, his charges were the usual moderate ones of the day, such as have long been discarded by the Profession; and many of his fees appear never to have been collected. His practice was very large, and continually increasing.

Jefferson slandered Mr. Henry by "connecting his name with the infamous Yazoo, Mississippi, speculation." This slander is refuted by Mr. Henry's Papers, which shew

that it was an entirely different company with which he was connected. The Virginia Yazoo Company, composed of Judge Paul Carrington, Joel Watkins, Francis Watkins, and other gentlemen, all of high character. John Randolph, who assailed, in Congress, with great bitterness, the Mississippi Company; on the death of Colonel Joel Watkins, one of the Virginia Company, in writing his obituary, says: "Under the guidance of old-fashioned honesty and practical good sense, he accumulated an ample fortune, in which it is firmly believed by all who knew him, there was not a dirty shilling."

Jefferson represented that Mr. Henry was influenced by the financial system of Hamilton to change his politics. This lie is disposed of by the fact that "one of the last acts of Mr. Henry's public life was a protest against the very feature of that system, which, according to Jefferson, put money into Mr. Henry's pocket, and made him a political apostate." "The Legislature of Virginia did not look upon Mr. Henry as an apostate. In 1794, Mr. Henry was elected United States Senator, and in 1796, he was elected Governor for the sixth time. The State of Virginia, though abounding in great men at the time, imposed upon Mr. Henry her highest offices during a period of more than twenty years, and continued to proffer them, even after they had been steadfastly refused."

Jefferson imputes duplicity to Washington, in "offering Mr. Henry the position of Secretary of State, to flatter him, knowing he would not accept, and was entirely unqualified for it." The statements contained in Washington's letter, offering the position to Mr. Henry, extinguish the slander.

Jefferson asserted, that "Mr. Henry expressed, more than any other man, his thorough contempt and hatred of General Washington." An unmitigated malicious falsehood! Chief Justice Marshall, in his Life of Washington, states that Mr. "Henry was truly the personal friend of General Washington." "To the same effect is the testimony of Mr. A. Blair, Secretary of the Council of Virginia. He writes to General Washington, on the 19th of June, 1790: "I had the honour to qualify for my present office, when Mr. Henry commenced the administration of our Revolutionary Government. From that period to the day of his death, I have been on the most intimate, and I believe, friendly terms with him. With regard to you, Sir, I may say, as he said of Marshall, that he loved you, and for the same reason, because you felt and acted as a Republican, as an American."

Mr. Henry himself, writing to Gen. Washington, the 17th of October, 1795, concludes his letter, (full of expressions and confidence and affection,) thus: "Forgive, Sir, these effusions, and permit me to add to them one more, which is an ardent wish, that the best reward which are due to a well-spent life may be yours.

With sentiments of the most sincere esteem and high regard, I am, Dear Sir, your much obliged and very humble servant.

J. HENRY."

This is exposed, and held up to universal contempt, the wretched slanderer of illustrious Patriots.

The man who was capable of slandering George Washington and Patrick Henry, was capable of any meanness and falsifying.

Jefferson destroys his credibility as a witness, and his testimony may, therefore, be ruled out of court.

When the time comes to erect the Monument to the Signers of The Mecklenburg Declaration, I shall bring to light, Documents, which prove beyond a doubt," to men of sense, "that the Mecklenburg Declaration of May 20: 1775 was" A Glorious Reality!

A. W. MILLER.