DESPITE his political alignment with the Republicans, Edmund Randolph as Attorney General was friendly with Alexander Hamilton, both before and after the political split of 1792, when Hamilton attacked Jefferson and brought about the first general alignment into two opposing national parties. Among others of the faithful, Randolph rallied to the defense of the Secretary of State.

As “An American” in the Gazette of the United States, Hamilton had accused Jefferson of an unethical relationship with Frennau, his translator and the editor of the anti-Hamilton National Gazette; of a general opposition to the Constitution and administration; and of advising an “immoral” transfer of the French debt to a Dutch concern. Before replying, Randolph wrote to Jefferson assuring him of his support, and to Madison, who had been implicated in the charges as the negotiator with Frennau in the establishment of the Gazette. Both answers being delayed, he broke into print as “Aristides,” here quoted largely for the first time:

IN your Gazette of the 4th and 11th of last month, there appeared two publications under the signature of “AN AMERICAN,” replete with the most virulent abuse of Mr. Jefferson; and containing charges against him, founded in the basest calumny and falshood. . . . How long Mr. Jefferson has been distinguished as the

Cataline of the day... and whether he is now, for the first time, thus distinguished, because of the manly freedom with which he declares his abhorrence of some of the leading principles of Mr. Hamilton’s fiscal administration; or, that because of his known attachment to republicanism, he is feared, as the decided opponent of aristocracy, monarchy, hereditary succession, a titled order of nobility, and all the other mock-pageantry of kingly government, will be the subject of future enquiry.

The writer challenged the “calumniator” to produce the proof of his charges or suffer a public condemnation himself, accused him of cowardice in hiding behind a pseudonym, and insinuated that he was in fact the Secretary of the Treasury:

It is his duty, therefore, to substantiate his charge. ... I have no hope, however, that he will ever attempt to bring forward the proofs... he will now retreat behind an anonymous signature... like a cowardly assassin, who strikes in the dark, and securely wounds, because he is unseen...

It has been said, Mr. Fenno, that a certain head of a department is the real author or instigator...

Aristides.

To defend Jefferson from the charge of opposing the Constitution, Randolph referred to a letter read to the Virginia Convention by its president, Edmund Pendleton. In this letter, Jefferson, then minister to France, had praised the provisions of the Constitution, although he had urged some amendments. As to the matter of the French debt, “Aristides” asserted that “the accuser skulks from the charge” in admitting a hazy recollection of Jefferson’s “recommendation.”

In rebuttal, Hamilton changed his pseudonym to “Catullus,” pretending to be a new writer. He now devoted several papers, well known to historians, to meeting the arguments of “Aristides.” But in another paper, not included in his Works, he wrote the longest and most searing satire of all his anti-Jefferson papers. As “SCOURGE,” he is at his sarcastic worst, for he takes unwarrantable personal liberties with the Secretary of State. This 3,000-word public letter,
like those by “Catullus,” is also addressed to “Aristides,” and is here quoted for the first time:

INDEED, Mr. Aristides, you merit ostracism much more than your namesake of old; not however for being too just or too honest, but, first, for having become the champion of a person whom you have yourself christened “Cataline”; and secondly, for having made so very clumsy a defense for your patron. . . . It is an old saying . . . that a man frequently loses more by the folly of his friends, than the viciousness of his enemies. . . . I shall now shew that Aristides has not attempted an answer to the very serious charge . . . of his patron’s having set up a newspaper in this city, for the express purpose of abusing and traducing the Secretary of the Treasury. . . .

It appears from the above that it was this personal persecution by the National Gazette, rather than a patriotic urge to defend the administration and fiscal laws (which he had given to Washington as his primary reason), that had stirred Hamilton to rise in his wrath and attack. “Scourge” went on sarcastically:

BUT Aristides says further, that this abhorrence is declared by his patron with a manly freedom: How far he may declare his sentiments on this subject with manly freedom among his own party, is best known to them; but certain it is, that in other societies he is distinguished for a very different mode of procedure; cautious and shy, wrapped up in impenetrable silence and mystery, he reserves his abhorrence for the arcana of a certain snug sanctuary, where seated on his pivot-chair, and involved in all the obscurity of political mystery and deception . . . he compounds and, with the aid of his active tools, circulates his poison thro’ the medium of the National Gazette.

Hamilton then scoffed at the denial of opposition to the Constitution. He ridiculed the inconsistency of Jefferson’s letter to Pendleton—“I suppose he was seated on his pivot when he wrote that epistle”—and concluded in caustic humor:

In short, his opinion appears to have been as versatile as his chair, and as in schools, applications to the breech are said to have a wonderful effect on the head, by driving up learning, so there appears to be such a wonderful connexion between the seat and the head of this great politician, and the motions of the one have such a powerful effect on the operations of the other, that we may say with the American poet—

But should his Honor raise Bum-fiddle,
The Charm would break off in the middle.

“Scourge” then went on to point out the wide difference between the attitudes of Jefferson the ambassador and Jefferson the Secretary of State. From Paris, Jefferson had opposed a schism in the Union,


but in Philadelphia had encouraged it. This "surprising change" was ascribed by "Scourge" to *dire ambition* and a fear of the Secretary of the Treasury, whose ruin was necessary. Therefore, "to this end," he argued, Jefferson the great hypocrite had directed "all his means,"

—on the one hand, a monstrous affectation of pure republicanism, primitive simplicity, and extraordinary zeal for the public good—on the other hand, to cry down the funding system, the bank, the excise law, as emanations from the Secretary of the Treasury. ... Thus ... we see ... plain Thomas J———; wonderful humility on all occasions—the flimsy veils of inordinate ambition ... a Gazette established under his auspices, to circulate encomiums on his own administration, and abuse on his rivals.

Hamilton could not resist the temptation to taunt his older, unmilitary rival with the widely bruited report of his "cowardice" in fleeing from the British invasion of 1780, though how a governor, singlehanded, could have opposed a raiding party was never explained. Jefferson, moreover, had been exonerated of all blame. Yet Hamilton taunted:

As to his being what Aristides calls him an old meritorious public servant, it is supposed his eminent services in Virginia, at the time of Tarlton's invasion, are alluded to; and as to the crime of An American, in attacking Mr. J——— during his absence, this would not have happened had he been attending to his duty where he ought to be.

This essay was a *tour de force* in flippant satire, such as might have been expected from Freneau, Bache, or even Callender. To this piece of impertinence, "Aristides" replied sternly in the *National Gazette*:

The enlightened citizens of America will not readily assent to the idea, that that man is an enemy to the rights of human nature, or to the union & prosperity of his country, whose public acts and writings have already distinguished him as the great mover, and champion of the independence of his country; the uniform and zealous friend to the present union of the States; the strenuous advocate of a Bill of Rights to secure the liberties of his fellow citizens; the firm and able asserter of the freedom of the blacks; the author of that glorious system of toleration and universal freedom in the rights of conscience enacted into law in Virginia, and to which the national assembly of France, and most of the philosophers in Europe have paid their tribute of applause; and, finally, whose virtues and talents still return to him the unimpaired confidence of that great man, who, watching with a comprehensive and equal eye over the interests of an extensive community, committed to his charge, has, with that just estimate of character for which he is so remarkable, selected this gentleman to fill an important station in the government.

6 H. J. Coolidge, *Thoughts on Thomas Jefferson* (Boston, 1936), 22: "Jefferson was subsequently vindicated, not only by his own legislature (unanimously) but by Washington, Steuben and Lafayette.”

7 September 26, 1792.
He now returned the stone thrown by "Scourge," charging that the pretext for the attack was the desire to ruin Jefferson’s repute and to divert political attention from inquiry into certain public measures. He rejected as “frivolous” the assertion that the National Gazette had been pensioned, the Constitution opposed, or a French debt transfer advised by Jefferson. But, he added, “the true ground of all this calumny” was now clear:

Scourge... in fearful terms deprecates Mr. Jefferson as the rival of Mr. Hamilton, and the dreadful opposer of all those fiscal measures, which his terrors tell him, will fall before the wisdom and virtue of a Jefferson.

Taking his cue from his opponent’s satire, “Aristides” in conclusion flouted the threatened proof of the “promised documents” (still absent) which were to establish the corrupt subordination of the National Gazette. He praised its openness to all parties, and ridiculed as evidence the “presumptive facts and circumstances” argued by “Catullus.” He reviewed the charges, denied them all, and said farewell to the dispute:

Aristides will now, Mr. Freneau, take his final leave of “An American,” “Catulus,” and “Scourge,” with this single remark, that while for the sake of disguise, and the better to divert the suspicion of the public from the real author and instigator of their calumnies... they multiply signatures... it would be well for them so far to alter their sameness of style, as to furnish an observant reader, with some ground... for supposing that there is any thing materially variant, in the language or expression of the TRIO. Merely in pity to the sagacious surmises of Scourge, that Mr. Jefferson is the friend and patron of Aristides, it is declared that this writer is not known to that gentleman. ...

Philadelphia, Sept. 25.

Aristides.

Randolph had, of course, detected the hand of Hamilton in all these productions, just as had Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and many others accustomed to reading The Federalist papers or the reports of the Treasury. Retorting, Hamilton described the second paper of “Aristides” as the work of a new writer.8 The style does differ somewhat from that in the first—and the essay may well have been the work of someone other than Randolph, or of several persons, among whom might have been Freneau himself, who did not scruple to write letters addressed to himself as editor, signed with a variety of pseudonyms. The curious ending declared that

8 Hamilton’s Works, VII, 280 (note).
"this writer is not known" to Jefferson. Was this a trick to confound Hamilton? He was using similar subterfuges to avoid a revelation of his own authorship. But there seems little doubt that Randolph was responsible for this reply and approved its contents.

Hamilton never reappeared as "Scourge." But, as "Catullus," he replied on October 17, 1792, again attacking the National Gazette, scorning the idea of its impartiality, or Jefferson’s reported refusal to influence its editorial content. But now he found himself more concerned to answer a considered, weighty "Vindication of Mr. Jefferson" by Madison and Monroe.10 "Aristides" apparently was content to leave further defenses to them.

Although Randolph may have been disturbed and angry with Hamilton at this time, it does not appear that there was ever an extended rift between them, personal or official. When the Cabinet met again in November, despite strained relations, there seems to have been a resumption of official co-operation. Randolph’s habit of straddling issues, of reluctance to take a positive position, of trying as far as possible to agree with both sides, in his sincere attempts to arrive at the impartial legal truth, annoyed Jefferson and barely appeased Hamilton. And in the spring, Randolph had reason to be grateful to the Secretary of the Treasury at a time of financial strain, writing, "I am extremely thankful to you," in a letter of more than official friendliness.11

It is clear that Hamilton did not regard Randolph as a serious opponent, and significant that in his letters the name of the author of "Aristides" is conspicuous by its almost total absence, for he never had any confidence in this middle-roader.12 While Jefferson was treating Randolph with contempt as a chameleon, Hamilton was regarding him merely as a nonentity—except for the one exciting incident, when he was forced to answer "Aristides."

Miami University

PHILIP M. MARSH

9 Ibid., VII, 273 ff.
12 Hamilton to Washington, October 16, 1795, Hamilton’s Works, X, 123-124: "I have seen the intercepted letter, which, I presume, led to his resignation. I read it with regret, but without much surprise, for I never had any confidence in Mr. Randolph."