

while at the same time the thousand gossiping tongues of society were taking up and repeating the same question.

Reports of Hamilton's conduct were brought to Burr at the close of the campaign by certain renegade Federalists driven from the ranks by their chief's arrogance; but he seems to have taken no action in the matter, and awaited further developments. At length his attention was called to a letter,—written by Dr. Charles D. Cooper, of New York, and published in the newspapers during the campaign—which contained, among others, the following sentences:

“Gen. Hamilton and Judge Kent have declared in substance, that they looked upon Mr. Burr to be a dangerous man, and one who ought not to be trusted with the reins of government,” and “I could detail to you a still more despicable opinion, which Gen. Hamilton has expressed of Mr. Burr.” Col. Burr quietly marked the obnoxious passages, and sent them by the hand of his friend, William P. Van Ness, to Gen. Hamilton, with a note which concluded as follows:

“You must perceive, sir, the necessity of a prompt and unqualified acknowledgment or denial of the use of any expressions which would warrant the assertions of Mr. Cooper.” The correspondence which followed is too voluminous for insertion here. In it Burr maintained the position taken in his first letter. Hamilton denied in part, equivocated, hedged, but absolutely refused to make the unqualified acknowledgment and denial asked for by Col. Burr. Such a course would have reinstated his rival in public confidence, and destroyed the work of years. Society too might have considered it an apology from *necessity* rather than *principle*. Burr, on his part, all the lion in him roused by Hamilton's repeated and treacherous attacks, receded not a whit from his original demand. In one of his letters on the subject he most admirably defined his position:

“Political opposition,” said he, “can never absolve gentlemen from the necessity of a rigid adherence to the laws of honor, and the rules of decorum. I neither claim such privilege, nor indulge it in others. The common sense of mankind affixes to the epithet adopted by Dr. Cooper the idea of dishonor. It has been publicly applied to me, under the sanction of your name. The question is not whether he has understood the meaning of the word, or has used it according to syntax and with grammatical accuracy, but whether you have authorized this application, either directly, or