

Wmsburg 18th May 1808^o

My dear Watson,

"Ehen! fugaces, Posthume, Posthume,
"Labuntum anni ___"

If time, so precious to man, glides thus, irresistibly on, & life shortens, each moment, what must be the reflections of one who has sacrificed to Idleness so great a part of his life? But where will he find consolation, when, as soon as he supposes, he has effected a reformation, and is employing himself in a manner, which may redound to his advantage; he is induced to believe or to fear, at least, that his time is yet misspent?

Your time has been spent (or perhaps misspent) in trying to become a lawyer. You are dissatisfied with your "progress" — You are not pleased with being "very fat." All this, I suppose however, may be attributed to that universal cause, which operates to make every one discontent, with his own lot; and one may ask, with Horace, "Qui fit, Macenas, ut nemo" &c.

The unfortunate disturbance, which took place, last winter, between the students, and professors of the College, if not fairly and circumstantially represented, might induce people less acquainted than yourself with the professors, to draw unfavorable and unjust conclusions. That you may do justice to both parties, I will give you a relation [i.e., relation?] of facts. You "augured ill of their effects." I apprehended serious consequences at the beginning, but the storm spent its rage against the rocks.

Page 2

But to the narrative -- A student by the name of Smith, who by the by, is a very small man, had been repeatedly insulted by the old post master, Davis. Smith conceiving that he had no other method of revenge determined (after he had taken a few glasses of wine) to repay Davis in his own coin. He accordingly went to the P. Office at night, whilst D. was delivering the papers and indulged himself, in the most unrestrained and immodest abuse of D. During this abuse and unknown to Smith, Brackan was in the P. Office, & consequently, witness of S.'s conduct. Davis complained, in ye. morning, to the President and Smith was summoned before the society. Brackan gave in testimony, that S. made use of the most profane and obscene language, he ever heard. S. plead guilty, but justifiable on the grounds of a previous insult, and desired the professors to proceed.

When they discovered that he was resolved to justify his conduct, they did proceed to vote an expulsion. Mr. Tucker was no[t] otherwise active, I believe, than in examining the witnesses and decla[r]ing his opinion. The students were then very much agitated, and did not hesitate to censure the Conduct of the professors, and particularly of Mr. Tucker. Some of them declared that if the sentence were not revoked they would publish the injustice of the expulsion; and indeed others went so far as to declare that they would break the jud[g]es windows, if the expulsion were continued. A meeting of the students, was however held, to decide on some mode of proceeding in order to obtain a repeal of the decree. To this end a committee of five was appointed to address the professors. An address was drawn up containing, a statement of the evils which would result to the object of their disapprobation, a de-

Page 3

claration of the injustice of the sentence, and praying a repeal thereof. That was sent first to the Bishop, together with depositions to prove his previous insult & accompanied by a letter from Smith acknowledging, that altho' he had just cause of resentment against Davis, he had chosen an improper time of repaying this resentment. After reading their papers, the Bishop sent for me, and declared that he was anxious, if possible to revoke the sentence, but that he thought the address of the students calculated rather than to confirm, than to produce a rescindment of, the decree. He expressed a good deal of concern for Smith, and said that he was of opinion, that if a proper address was sent on by the students, stating the general good conduct of S. (which they might have done) and S. would acknowledge the impropriety of his conduct and promise future good behavior the sentence might yet be repealed. Another meeting was called, and another address proposed and rejected. The former was then sent to the other professors. Mr. Tucker had the same opinion of it with the Bishop. They both declared, that they would vote for its being thrown under the table if it came before the society. The professors had a second and a third meeting on the occasion, and at length determined to let the business drop and S remain a student.

You have now a statement of the facts. I will only, in justice to myself, say, that during the transactions, I uniformly approved every measure, which would implicate the propriety of the professor's conduct. You will now be enabled to judge of the conduct both of professors and students.

the conduct of a student of W&M meet my most cordial approbation. I have before, given you my opinion of the Bishop. A longer acquaintance has not altered it, but every act of his life tends more to confirm it. At the time that [I] spoke of the Bishop, my acquaintance with Tucker was not sufficient to authorize an opinion of his merit. Since then I have become as intimately acquainted with him as the shortness of time would permit_ I am happy to find your opinion of him, is perfectly correspondent with my own. Whatever may be said of his hauteur or austerity I believe him to be "Justum et tenaum propositi Visum."

Whatever vulgar respect, too much lenity might command, or whatever praises, easy and popular manners may deserve, yet

—"An honest man's the noblest work of god."

Whatever enemies, his rigid justice may occasion him, yet

"One Self approving hour, whole years outweigh

"Of stupid stares, & of loud huzzas."

I have often reflected, and with regret, on the exorbitant expenses of education in this Country, and particularly, on the extravagance of the students of W&Mary. To remedy the evils resulting therefrom to my Country would be a work in which I should engage, with peculiar satisfaction. But independently of the strength I feel in the Welfare of our common Country, my own circumstances render it a matter of primary concern, with me to reduce, as much as possible, the expenses of education. Such a society, as you mention, might probably be effected, had we at College, more students whose object was rather em-

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LETTERS TO DAVID WATSON

For permission to copy and print these letters (formerly a part of the Watson papers) we are indebted to Mr. Thomas J. Michie, of Charlottesville, and Mr. Herbert A. Claiborne, of Richmond.

With the exception of the letters from F. W. Gilmer and one from J. C. Cabell, those printed below were written from William and Mary. The letter of Mr. Cabell, referred to, was written in the interval between the completion of his academic course and his return to Williamsburg to enter the law course. The last letter from Mr. Gilmer was written while he was abroad seeking professors for the University of Virginia.

FROM ROBERT MICHIE¹

Dear David:—

Wm & Mary, Nov. 3rd, 1797.

When you receive this you will unavoidably confess that I am a man of my word according to the proverb for whensoever I have promised you I have omitted to write.

Your letter to Howard is in my trunk he has not yet come. He was seen by the Bishop in his circuit—requested him particularly to direct Moir to reserve a room from which we may calculate on his coming back—I have taken your room as its called in college and have the happiness to tell you that there is an alteration considerable in the Brafferton[†] diet but far

¹ For note on Robert Michie, see April Magazine, p. 134.

[†] The Brafferton is a brick house on the campus of William and Mary. It was built in 1723 for the use of the Indian school founded under the bequest of Hon. Robert Boyle, 1692. The funds bequeathed were invested in the purchase of the manor of Brafferton in York-

illustration of Philosophical phenomena. Upon the whole I think these lectures far preferable to any yet delivered.

Present my compliments to your father's family.

C. Johnson.

Be kind enough to take a letter out of the P. office for my bro. R. and forward it to him as soon as possible.

C. J.

[Addressed] David Watson Esq.
Atto. at Law
Louisa

Mail Rich'd P. office.

FROM CHAPMAN JOHNSON.

Wmsburg, 18th May, 1800.

My dear Watson:—

"Ehue! fugaces, Posthume, Posthume,
Laburtur annos ———"

If time, so precious to man, glides thus, inevitably on, life shortens, each moment, what must be the reflections of one who has sacrificed to Idleness, so great a part his life? But when, will he find consolation, when, so soon as he supposes, he has effected a reformation, and is employing himself in a manner, which may redound to his advantage; he is induced to believe or to fear, at least, that his time is yet misspent?

Your "time has been spent (or perhaps misspent) in trying to become a lawyer". You are dissatisfied with your "progress" You are not pleased with being "very fat." All this, I suppose however, may be attributed to that universal cause, which operates to make every one discontented, with his own lot; and we may ask, with Horace, "Qui fit Maecenas ut Nemo," &c.

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unfavorable and unjust conclusions. That you may do justice to both parties, I will give you a relation of facts. You "augured ill of their effects"; I apprehended serious consequences at the beginning, but the storm spent its rage against the rocks.

But to the narrative—A student by the name of Smith, who by the by, is a very small man, had been repeatedly insulted, by the old postmaster, Davis. Smith conceiving, that he had no other method of revenge, determined (after he had taken a few glasses of wine) to repay Davis in his own coin. He accordingly, went to the Post Office, at night, whilst Davis was delivering the papers and indulged himself, in the most unrestrained and immoderate abuse of D. During the abuse and unknown to Smith, Bracken⁹ was in the P. Office, and consequently, witness of S.'s conduct. Davis complained, in the morning to the President; and Smith was summoned before the Society. Bracken gave in testimony, that S. made use of the most profane and obscene language, he ever heard. S. plead guilty, but justifiable on the ground of a previous insult, and desired the professors to proceed. When they discovered that he was resolved to justify his conduct, they did proceed to vote an expulsion. Mr. Tucker was not otherwise active, I believe, than in examining the witnesses, and declaring his opinion. The students were then very much agitated, and did not hesitate to censure the conduct of the professors, and particularly of Mr. Tucker, some of them declared, that if the sentence were not revoked they would publish the injustice of the expulsion, and indeed, others went so far as to declare, that they would break the judge's windows, if the expulsion were continued. A meeting of the students, was however, held, to decide on some mode of proceeding in order to obtain a repeal of the decree. To this end a committee of five was appointed to address the professors. An address was drawn up containing a statement of the evils which would result to the object of their disapprobation, a declaration of the injustice of the

⁹ Rev. John Bracken was rector of Bruton parish 1773-1818, at various times professor in the College and master of the grammar school and was in 1812-14, President of the College.

sentence, and praying a repeal thereof. This was sent first to the Bishop, together with depositions, to prove his previous result, and accompanied by a letter from Smith acknowledging, that altho he had just cause of resentment against Davis, he had chosen an improper time of expressing this resentment. After reading these papers, the Bishop sent for me, and declared that he was desirous, if possible, to revoke the sentence; but that he thought the address of the students calculated rather to confirm, than to produce a rescindment of, the decree. He expressed a good deal of concern for Smith, and said that he was of opinion, that if a proper address was sent in by the students, stating the general good conduct of S. (which they might have done) and, S. would acknowledge the impropriety of his conduct and promise future good behaviour, the sentence might yet be repealed. Another meeting was called, and another address proposed, and rejected. The former was then sent to the other professors. Mr. Tucker had the same opinion of it with the Bishop. They both declared, that they would vote for its being thrown under the table if it came before the Society. The professors had a second and a third meeting on the occasion, and at length determined to let the business drop and S. remain a student.

You have here a statement of the facts. I will only in justice to myself say, that during the transaction, I uniformly approved every measure, which would implicate the propriety of the professor's conduct. You will now be enabled to judge of the conduct both of professors and students.

Your observations on the motives which should influence the conduct of a student of Wm. & Mary meet my most cordial approbation. I have before given you my opinion of the Bishop. A longer acquaintance has not altered it; but every act of his life tends more to confirm it. At the time that [I] spoke of the Bishop, my acquaintance with Tucker, was not sufficient to authorize an opinion of his merit. Since then I have become as intimately acquainted with him as the shortness of time would permit—I am happy to find your opinion of him, so perfectly correspondent with my own. Whatever may be said of his hauteur or austerity I believe him to be "Justum

et tenacum propositi virum." Whatever vulgar respect, too much liberty might command, or whatever praises easy and popular manners may deserve, yet

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I have often reflected, and with regret on the exorbitant expenses of education in this Country, and particularly, on the extravagance of the students of William and Mary. To remedy evils resulting therefrom to my Country, wou'd be a work in which I should engage, with peculiar satisfaction. But independently of the interest I feel in the welfare of our common country, my own circumstances make it a matter of primary concern with me to reduce, as much as possible, the expenses of education. Such a society, as you mention, might probably be effected, had we at College more students whose object was rather improvement, than pleasure, and whose fortunes made frugality more necessary. But the genius and dissipation of our students forbid us to entertain a hope that such a society, at this time, be instituted.

"If in a picture (Watson) you should see
A handsome woman, with a fishes tail,
Or a man's head upon a horses neck,
Or limbs of beasts of the most different kinds
Covered with feathers of all kinds of birds
Would you not laugh—"

The lectures commence tomorrow, on the conclusion of the May Vacation. We have had only one lecture on Hydrostatics. In that was mentioned, and endeavored to be explained the Hydrostatic paradox. It is truly paradoxical I think however it may be explained; but not on the principles I have seen advanced in support of it (viz) "action and reaction." It would extend this already long letter, to too great a length, were I to attempt explaining my thoughts on the

subject, and I am sure I could not do it satisfactorily to you and [part of page missing] satisfied with my investigations [torn] ciple on which it is built moving bodies. You will at, tho', I suppose I am pleased with hearing it announced from almost every quarter that Jefferson is to be our next president. I only wish that it may not be a mistake. What has produced the change? I suppose the number of innocent victims of the oppressive sedition law, the repeated and frequent violations of the Constitution, the want of that cabalistic term "French Invasion" and perhaps the operation of Congressional taxes, have, at length, taught the people to reflect and endeavor to avoid the dangerous abyss, on the brink of which they have so long tottered.

I should like to have your opinion of the constitutionality if the late election bill passes in Congress. From the slight reading I have given it, there appears to me palpable infractions of the Constitution contained in it.

Do you think my hand has improved? The last letter I wrote to you, was executed in such haste that I could with difficulty, read it myself.

Respects to your father's family.

[Bottom of page torn; but the letter is in the writing of Chapman Johnson].

[Address] Cit. David Watson
Attorney at Law
Louisa

Via Charlottesville.

FROM CHAPMAN JOHNSON

Wmsburg 14th Aug., 1800.

I was less surprised at seeing F. Harris, tho entirely unexpected, than concerned at the unfortunate occasion of his journey. My personal acquaintance with Mr. ——— is slight. But I was, once, at his house. Under no man's roof, have I found greater benevolence and hospitality. I shall never think my time and labor badly spent, in alleviating the misfortunes of