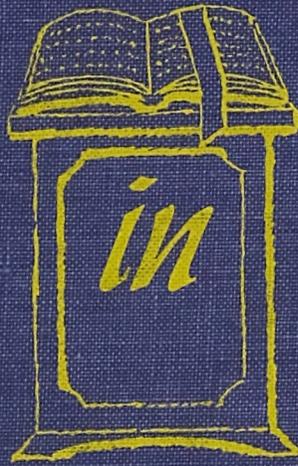


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Varnum Lansing Collins

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE



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PRESIDENT WITHERSPOON

VOLUME ONE

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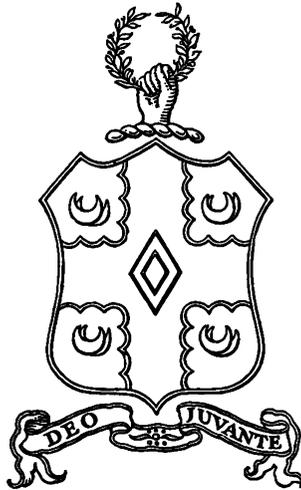
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PRESIDENT
WITHERSPOON

A BIOGRAPHY

BY
VARNUM LANSING COLLINS



VOLUME ONE

PRINCETON
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

1925

PREFACE

A LETTER TO EDWARD DICKINSON DUFFIELD

My dear EDWARD:—

MORE years ago than it is exhilarating to count, an undergraduate at Princeton composed an oration which he entitled "Scotch Granite," his fanciful name for President Witherspoon. Delivered on every sort of occasion,—prize contests, "chapel stage," extempore speaking in Hall, and I do not know where else (there must have been more time for oratory in those days than now),—the oration as you doubtless remember acquired campus fame beyond the average. And it deserved the applause it received, for it was good.

You were the orator; and I, by some happy chance, was often one of your listeners. I say happy, because I have ever since been glad that my curiosity was stirred by your enthusiastic delineation of the great President's character. But when in later years I tried to learn more about him I found only desiccated sketches in biographical dictionaries, a funeral sermon, a notice prefixed to his collected writings, and a brief memoir or two. So I resolved to gather the materials and myself attempt the story of his life.

This is the story. It has been a long time in the making, for I have been busied about many other things while it was growing; and now to give it to the printer seems like parting from an old friend. Yet I hope it will not be found to have suffered for the delay. Such as it is, this unassuming narrative of the life of one whom I think you rightly called a great American I dedicate to you, not only because you were its original source of inspiration, but also (and even more gratefully) because of our long and loyal friendship.

It is not with false modesty that I call this book unassuming. Do not let the notes and references deceive you with any simulation of erudition; on the contrary, some of them are merely cor-

PREFACE

ments; they were his “wig and bag and sword,” and they have not all grown trivial with the passing years. His management of the college over which he presided was so peculiarly characteristic, its misfortune during the Revolution and its labored recovery were so personal to him that here also the story of his life is an inextricable part of another and longer narrative—that of the College of New Jersey in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. You cannot tell the one without relating to some extent the other; he dominated and permeated the place; to the public outside he was the place; and it has been my effort to justify contemporary opinion. But I have fallen wretchedly short of my intention if I have let the larger life of his times, in which he moved so vigorously, or even the story of his administration at Princeton, overshadow the “dressing-gown and slippers,” the qualities that brought him into prominence, and the lovable personality that held him there and gave him the influence he wielded.

My indebtednesses are so many that it is not possible even to name all who have given me their aid so generously; my thanks are offered to them no less heartily because it must be done in this general manner. Especially am I under obligation to the former minister of Paisley’s Abbey Church, the late Reverend Dr. Gentles, whose cordial hospitality to the American stranger within his gates more than a decade ago makes that visitor almost ashamed now to write this belated public acknowledgment of his interest and genial courtesy. And similarly, another debt that cannot now be fully repaid is the one I owe to President Witherspoon’s great-great grandson, the late General Alfred A. Woodhull of Princeton, who not only never failed to satisfy my importunity but so graciously for many years also gave me the honor of his intimate friendship and the benefit of his resourceful suggestions and great stores of information. I must acknowledge too, the assistance of Mr. J. Harvey Witherspoon Phillips of Tampa, Florida, who lent me valuable records and inconvenienced himself by carrying out investigations beyond my reach; and also the help of the Rev. G. H. Ingram of Trenton, until lately clerk of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, who gave me access to the remarkable manuscript minutes of that body. My particular and warmest thanks are extended to Dr. John E.

PREFACE

Peters of Camden, New Jersey, as learned and indefatigable in his researches into Presbyterian and Princeton history as he is generous in sharing the results of his persevering and well-nigh inerrant labors.

When I consider the libraries in Scotland, England, and the United States whose staffs I have pestered with requests, I am filled with dismay; I owe them so much. But if one staff may be singled out above the rest, it is that of the Library of Princeton University—*quorum pars fui*—and I would here remember with gratefulness the innumerable and uniformly helpful courtesies and privileges accorded to me by that staff since I left its membership. Frequent and special favors have likewise been shown me by the staff of the Library of Princeton Theological Seminary and those of the Pennsylvania Historical Society and the New Jersey Historical Society. Libraries and librarians seldom receive just due from makers of books; their aid is taken, as it were, for granted. This is the appreciation of one who knows somewhat of their unceasing and often thankless toil.

And thus, my dear Edward, with these totally inadequate acknowledgments I withdraw from the scene; and, unrecognizable perhaps to you in his latter-day dress, your "Scotch Granite" takes the stage. But under his new trappings I hope you will find the same great heart you described to us years ago.

V. L. C.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY YEARS

FOUR miles southeast of Haddington in the Scottish shire of that name, by a road that winds over rolling country, lies the village of Gifford in the parish of Yester. It consists of a group of low stone cottages clustering on the bank of a little stream known as Gifford Water, a stream that wimples still on its way to the Tyne at Haddington as merrily as it did when the smooth turf on its banks was the bleaching ground of the newly formed British Linen Company.

Starting from the village cross, one branch of the single street runs parallel with Gifford Water and loses itself in a long avenue of ancient elms leading to Gifford, or Yester Castle, whose magical history is alluded to in *Marmion*. The other branch of the street in a few hundred paces brings one to the ivy-covered kirk in a yard shaded by trees as picturesquely venerable as itself. Close by, a cosy modern manse stands near the site of its eighteenth century predecessor. Latter-day improvements, which even sequestered spots like this may not escape, have swept away all trace of the humbler home where former ministers of Yester Parish lived, and where John Witherspoon was born.

Spelled in a variety of ways, the name Witherspoon occurs frequently enough in Scottish records; but it has not been the fortune of the writer to discover how directly the ancestors of John Witherspoon were connected with the original spearmen whose wooden pikes or spears, burned at the points for hardening, gave them the name of "wooden spon," whence came the early "Wotherspon" and the later varieties of the name.¹ The family was of old and honorable descent. The Witherspoon arms are or, a cross ingrailed betwixt four crescents, gules.² The crest is a dexter hand holding a garland of laurel all ppr., with the motto "*Deo juvante.*" The arms are not in Sir James Balfour Paul's *Ordinary*

¹H. A. Long, *The Names We Bear*, p. 104, 210.

²Alexander Nisbet, *System of Heraldry*, Edinburgh, 1816, vol. I, p. 123; Burke, *General Armory* (ed. of 1883) adds "a mascle ar."

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*of Arms*³ and it is safe to assume that they are not legitimately borne by any Scottish Witherspoods today. They date, however, at least from 1451, when an Alexander Witherspoon, as witness to a deed confirmed by James I, is mentioned in the Register of the Great Seal of Scotland as a scutifer. At that time the family seems to have been Glasgovan. Forty years later a James Witherspoon was burges of Glasgow and procurator of the lepers in the hospital, and from him the line is fairly traceable.

It is a line which has its full quota of public officials and clergymen. The records of the period name a James Widderspune who, between 1496 and 1507, at the court of James III of Scotland, ministered to the moods of royalty by being now "a fithelar and teller of tales" and now a "fowler" to the king;⁴ but it is unlikely that he and the Glasgow burges are identical. Among the latter's children was William who moved to Linlithgow and became burges of that city and owner of the Brig, or Bridge, House estate in Torpichen Parish. His son Robert was bailif of Linlithgow in 1539 and provost of the city from 1542 to 1554. But William's most interesting child was James, who, with a sister Katherine, was the subject of letters of legitimization issued by the queen in 1543. Under date of 1559 John Wetherspone and "James Wetherspowne of Brighthouse," a natural son of William mentioned above, are named as witnesses in one of the Laing charters owned by the University of Edinburgh;⁵ and a few years later James for a moment enters the story of Scotland's unhappiest queen. For in March, 1565, he was commanded with others to appear before the king and his spouse and their privy council to answer to the charge of complicity in the murder of David Riccio, her majesty's secretary. In August, 1571, he was forfeited, but in the following May he signed allegiance to the crown, and thereafter lived in peace, so far as the records show, until the closing year of his life when, in August, 1579, his bellicose disposition got him into his last earthly trouble. Found guilty of hav-

³ Second ed., Edinburgh, 1903.

⁴ *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, ed. Sir J. B. Paul, Edinburgh, 1877-1901, vols. I, II, III.

⁵ *Calendar of the Laing Charters*, ed. J. Anderson, Edinburgh, 1899, nos. 695, 707; also *Register Great Seal of Scotland*, vol. XXIX, p. 172.

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ing done bodily hurt to two other gentlemen he was ordered to pay a heavy fine or else languish in Edinburgh jail. But he neither paid the fine nor darkened the prison door, for the unassailable reason that he was lying "bedfast, deidly seik" at Linlithgow; and by January 19, 1580, he was dead.⁶

William of Linlithgow's great grandson John was a signer of the Solemn League and Covenant in 1648, and this John's son Alexander, a Glasgow merchant, seems to have been father of the Reverend James Witherspoon who in turn was the father of Princeton's President.⁷ Ministers, chaplains and vicars are scattered plentifully through the family history but no vindication has been found of the claim that there was an unbroken line of ministers behind Dr. Witherspoon extending back to John Knox.

During the end of the sixteenth century and through the seventeenth the valuable Witherspoon estate of Bridge House is frequently mentioned in deeds and charters; but, direct descendant though he is believed to have been, the Reverend James Witherspoon seems to have had no share in them. His will leaves no property save a paltry month's salary due him as a King's chaplain.⁸ Born in 1691, he was graduated from Edinburgh University in April, 1709, studied theology, and is lost sight of until November, 1719, when he was presented to Yester Parish. Installed at Gifford in March 1720, he entered immediately on this charge, remaining there until his death forty years later. On October 21, 1720, he was married at Gifford, to Anna, or Anne, daughter of the Reverend David Walker and Margaret Pater-son, his wife. Mr. Walker was minister of Temple Parish, County of Edinburgh. The alleged descent of the Walkers from John Knox is the source of the oft-asserted but unproved claim connecting President Witherspoon with the reformer.⁹

⁶ *Register, Privy Council of Scotland*, vol. I, p. 437; vol. II, p. 738; vol. III, p. 206; *Calendar, State Papers rel. to Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots*, vol. III, p. 669.

⁷ Some genealogies give David as the father of the Reverend James.

⁸ *Commissariat of Edinburgh*. Testaments, CXVIII.

⁹ It may be well to state at once the facts on which the conclusion implied above is based. John Knox was twice married. He left no children by his first wife. By his second wife, Margaret Stuart, daughter of Lord Ochiltree, he had among other children a daughter Elizabeth born about 1570 who married in 1594 the Rev. John Welsh of Ayr. She died in 1625 three years after her husband. They had three sons and two

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The date of Mrs. Witherspoon's birth is no longer of record, but the baptismal register of Temple parish shows that she was baptised July 19, 1696, and it is safe to assume that her birth did

daughters, of whom only the second son, Josias, and his younger sister, Louise, are concerned in the present matter.

Josias Welsh was the father of the once celebrated John Welsh, the deprived minister of Irongray, Dumfries. A Reverend John Blackader in his manuscript memoirs (Wodrow MSS., Advocates Library, Edinburgh) mentions the fact that he was acquainted with a young woman in Fife who was "a cousin of John Welsh of Irongray." This was approximately in 1674 when this John Welsh was making a preaching tour in Fifeshire.

Louise Welsh, the second daughter of Elizabeth Knox and John Welsh, the elder, was born at Jonsac in France in May, 1613; but after 1625, when she appears as a witness to her mother's will, all trace of her is lost. She is supposed to have returned to Scotland, to have married, to have settled in Fifeshire, and to have become the mother of the unidentified "young woman" of the Blackader manuscript. Moreover, this "young woman" is supposed to have married one of the two brothers, David or James Walker, farmers at Leslie, in Fifeshire, and thus to have become the mother of the Reverend David Walker, minister of Temple Parish. The Leslie birth and marriage records afford no light, as they do not antedate 1673 and 1729 respectively.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that genealogical claims based on suppositions like the above cannot be accepted seriously.

With David Walker the descent gets back to firm ground again. He married Margaret Paterson and was the father of Thomas and Anne (or Anna) Walker, the latter of whom married the Reverend James Witherspoon and became the mother of President Witherspoon. Her brother Thomas, in his day a well-known Scottish ecclesiastical writer, is the earliest of the alleged Knox descendants to claim the ancestry in print. This he does in his *Vindication of the Discipline and Constitution of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1774, p. 379). Assuming that he derived his information from his father, the Reverend David Walker of Temple, the Knox kinship is carried back close enough to the time of John Welsh of Irongray and the unknown cousin to acquire at least an air of possibility; but here again the evidence is lacking.

Dr. David Laing (*Knox's Works*, edited for the Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1865, vol. 6, p. LXXIII) considered it extremely doubtful that any descendants of Knox were existing. Dr. Charles Rogers (*Genealogical Memoirs of John Knox and the Family of Knox*, edited for the Grampian Club, London, 1879, p. 147) makes no reference to descendants although admitting that "it is not improbable" Louise Welsh may have been the mother of the young woman described as the cousin of John Welsh of Irongray. William Crawford, (*Knox Genealogy*, Edinburgh, 1896, p. 5) thinks it doubtful if any lineal descendants of the Reformer exist. Dr. D. Hay Fleming of St. Andrews, the historian and modern authority on Knox, in a letter to the author of these lines, admitted that the claim could not be lightly set aside, but had no fresh evidence in its support; while the authorities of H. M. Register House at Edinburgh frankly expressed to the writer their disbelief in the claim.

Finally it may be added that President Witherspoon himself does not appear to have ever claimed descent from the Reformer.

The most generous conclusion that can be reached, after examination of all available sources, manuscript and printed, is the Scottish one of "not proven."

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not precede this date by many days. Of her personality and character our only knowledge is derived by inference from the facts of her ministerial parentage and her marriage to a lowland parish minister, and from the early training she gave her children. In an entry made November 11, 1744, by her husband in his manuscript "Separate Register of the Presbytery of Haddington," he describes himself as a widower, and in the absence of any official register for the parish it will probably be impossible to get nearer to the exact date of Mrs. Witherspoon's death. Her grave is no longer marked in Gifford churchyard.

She was the mother of six children, born within ten years—John, the future president of Princeton, baptised February 10, 1723 (date of birth not recorded but said to be February 5), David, baptised February, 1725, Susan, baptised March 20, 1726, Josias (or Joseph) born February 9, 1729, baptised February 23, 1729, James, baptised October 29, 1730, and Margaret Ann born December 31, 1732. The little that is known of all save the first-born of these children is quickly told. David seems to have been the favorite brother of Dr. Witherspoon. The draft of a letter written to him in 1761 by the President and seen in later years by Dr. Ashbel Green but now lost, shows that he engaged in mercantile business in the West Indies and was unfortunate. Through his older brother's influence with the Marquis of Tweeddale a lieutenantancy was obtained for him on a British warship of 60 guns in which he sailed once more for the West Indies, and there he disappears from record. The President's son David was named after him—"your namesake is a comely thriving boy," says the letter already alluded to, "he is to be weaned in a few weeks." It will be seen later that the nephew shared his uncle's spirit of adventure and to some degree also his fate of unsolved mystery.

Susan Witherspoon married James French who was for nearly thirty years master of the High School at Edinburgh and their son James was at one time the tutor of Sir Walter Scott. Of Josias, all we have is a personal relic in the remnant of President Witherspoon's library at Princeton in the shape of a volume of Buchanan's poems bearing the inscription in a hand as boyish as its spelling is uncouth: "Josias Wederspan his Bugha nan Psalms

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febreyary on a seterday 1740." Of James nothing is known save that he died before November, 1744; and of Margaret Ann the sole records are the date of her birth and a casual mention of her in President Witherspoon's letter of 1761 to his brother David.

As for the father of this family, the Reverend James Witherspoon of Gifford, the sources of information besides being fragmentary are also conflicting. In general he is said to have filled his charge with exemplary fidelity. According to Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith, who wrote the memoir for Dr. Rodgers' funeral sermon on President Witherspoon, and whose source of information must originally have been the President himself, the Reverend James Witherspoon was notable for his piety and for the accurate learning displayed in his writings and pulpit utterances, a statement evidently borrowed by the author of the memoir of Dr. Witherspoon in the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* of October 1829.¹⁰ But how much this filial opinion is indebted for its tone to a dutiful observance of the fifth commandment, or how far it may be trusted as a critical judgment, we have no sermons or other writings of the Reverend James Witherspoon whereby to judge. The only comment on him as a preacher is an early one by the celebrated Robert Wodrow, who under date of May 13, 1728, writing from Edinburgh, mentions Mr. Witherspoon preaching there during a meeting of the General Assembly.¹¹ His text was the significant one "Contend earnestly for the truth," and he very naturally introduced Assembly topics into his discourse; but, ignoring his obvious authority for proper warmth, he "explained very softly, and much overlooked earnestness, recommending moderation and charity. Those who were mistaken, said he, may yet be right at heart; such as preach nowadays are sure to be misunderstood by one side or the other," and, adds Mr. Wodrow feelingly, "it's no desirable province." From this fleeting glimpse one infers that the minister of Gifford was a peaceable man, not eager in wrangle and dispute, theological or otherwise. In later years, if one may put any trust in a

¹⁰ The memoir is signed by "Presbyterian of the West" and is dated from Paisley. Ashbel Green's manuscript life of Dr. Witherspoon shows that the author was Thomas Crichton of Paisley.

¹¹ *Correspondence, Wodrow Society*, Edinburgh, 1843, vol. III, p. 365.

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youthful impression, this peace-loving disposition got somewhat the better of him and developed into slothfulness. The portrait of Mr. Witherspoon in the autobiography of Dr. Alexander Carlyle—"Jupiter" Carlyle of Scottish ecclesiastical history—is anything but flattering. But figs do not grow on thistles, and in more ways than one Dr. Carlyle was a very Scotch thistle. Flattery is not to be sought in his pages, and least of all when he is commenting on his early contemporaries. Principal Tulloch has pointed out that Dr. Carlyle's portraits are rough character sketches thrown out as it were off-hand, rather than attempts at elaborate description. But this view while charitable does not take into consideration Dr. Carlyle's avowed intentions. He began his autobiography when almost a decade past his allotted three-score years and ten, and in his opening paragraph declares that, having observed how "carelessly and consequently how falsely" history is written, he intends to set down certain facts within his knowledge for the use of the future historian, "to keep him within the bounds of truth and certainty." The venerable author fell foul of the very bounds he had erected, for a strict regard for "truth and certainty" leads inevitably to the suspicion that some of his early recollections are of dubious reliability. With this caution in mind we may then read that when, during his undergraduate days, young Carlyle was wont to go to Gifford manse in the summer to visit his college-mate John Witherspoon, the two boys used to fish all day under the trees that arched Gifford Water, in order to be out of reach of the Reverend James "who was very sulky and tyrannical, but who being much given to gluttony, fell asleep early, and went always to bed early, and being fat as a porpoise was not to be awaked so that," continues the breathless sentence, "we had three or four hours of liberty every night to amuse ourselves with the daughters of the family and their cousins who resorted to us from the village when the old man was gone to rest." Again, Dr. Carlyle recollects that in 1744 when he was entering his ministerial career, and according to custom had to visit the clergy of Haddington Presbytery singly for examination before admission to trials for a charge, he went to Gifford to call on Mr. Witherspoon. But besides having very few topics to examine on, the ponderous gentleman, we are told, was too lazy

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to engage in anything so arduous as the examination of a divinity student—"how to eat and drink and sleep being his sole care, though he was not without parts, if the soul had not been buried under a mountain of flesh." On the other hand it should be noted that in this very year, 1744, Mr. Witherspoon was appointed to a royal chaplaincy, a post with more honor perhaps than salary, but nevertheless a post of some distinction. He was frequently sent to the General Assembly and usually placed on important committees, and in 1742 he preached the annual sermon before the Lord High Commissioner. The manuscript session record of Yester parish has preserved for us a characteristic of his methods. He was accustomed to note therein the name of each Sunday's preacher with the text used, and thus is revealed his own but by no means exceptional habit of delivering a series of sermons from the same text. For instance, on Romans viii, 33, he preached eight successive Sundays, and seven on Ephesians v, 15. His son John is named for the first time as occupant of his father's pulpit on October 11, 1746, when he had been three years in the ministry. Twelve years later, on October 15, 1758, a much talked of man, the son preached in the same place for the last time during his father's incumbency. Mr. Witherspoon's constant prayer was that he might not outlive his usefulness and it is said that he prepared to preach one Sunday morning in August, 1759, was taken ill before church time, and by noon was dead. He was in his sixty-eighth year and left his eldest son his sole executor. His grave is in Gifford churchyard.¹²

The birth register of Yester parish for the beginning of the eighteenth century has followed the unknown path of the death

¹²On his tombstone now lies a memorial tablet added during the World War and bearing this inscription:

"JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D., LL.D., SON OF THE ABOVE,
PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY, U.S.A.,
MEMBER OF CONGRESS AND
SIGNER OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE 1776.
BORN IN THE MANSE HERE 5 FEBRUARY 1723
AND DIED IN HIS ADOPTED COUNTRY 15 NOVEMBER 1794.
AN UPHOLDER OF LIBERTY
HIS LIFE NOW TAKES ON
A NEW SIGNIFICANCE 1918."

The story of the recovery of Mr. Witherspoon's grave and of the addition of the inscription quoted above is told in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* of January 22, 1919.

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register; but happily the parish baptismal record is preserved at His Majesty's Register House in Edinburgh, and from it we learn that John Witherspoon was baptised at Gifford on February 10, 1723, the date of birth not being given. There appears to be no documentary authority for the traditional birth-date, February 5, 1722, adopted in all but one of the sketches of John Witherspoon that have come under observation. Prevalent Scottish custom required children to be baptised within two weeks of birth,—indeed usually within one week; and that the minister of Gifford should have allowed his first-born son to live over a year unchristened is incredible; such paganism would have stirred his austere parishioners to righteous indignation. February 5 may have been the day of John Witherspoon's birth; the year was certainly 1723.¹³

Of his childhood we have little record. He used to say that his early training was given him by his mother, and that he was able to read the Bible at the age of four. Compelled to memorize portions of it, at one time he could repeat nearly all the New Testament; Watts' *Psalms and Hymns* were learned in the same way. Judged by modern standards he was a remarkable boy, but in the group of men who gave distinction to eighteenth century Scotland he was not exceptional. His home life and training were probably not very different from that of hundreds of boys of his generation, save that as a parish minister's eldest son his future was more carefully planned. Precocious he may have been; a prig he was not. If the heather hills left on his mind no mark, and Scottish woodlands had for him no spell,—none at least to be reflected later in his writings—yet he knew the charm of angling in running waters; somehow he learned Scotland's ancient and honorable game; mastered also the tricks of curling; and the passage

¹³ The Rev. John Thomson, author of the article on the parish of Yester in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland by the Ministers of the respective Parishes*, (Edinburgh, 1845), was the first to call attention to the error in the traditional date. Corroboration is found curiously in an American diary. One evening in October, 1770, Dr. Ezra Stiles of Yale was President Witherspoon's host at New Haven, Conn., and drew from his guest a brief resumé of his life, recording the information in his diary. The dates of Dr. Witherspoon's matriculation at Edinburgh, of his ordination, and of his receiving an honorary degree from St. Andrews, are accurately given. The date of his birth is recorded as 1723. There seems to be no reason for assuming that this date is wrong.

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already quoted from Alexander Carlyle's autobiography shows that he profited by having sisters. The clerical bent of his mind, however, must have received its first impulse at home; he was destined for the church and that marked him. And yet beneath his seeming austerity we shall find that he kept a glowing vision—a love of liberty as free as the air of the hills among which he grew up.

He was early entered at the ancient grammar school of Haddington, and as a sturdy youngster probably tramped twice each day the four miles thither from Gifford. Founded before the Reformation, the Haddington Grammar School had given John Knox, the Maitlands, the Cockburns, and other famous Scotsmen, their early education. A stone's throw from the ruined abbey and the inky Tyne, the schoolhouse still stands with the Yester coat-of-arms, a goat rampant, on each gable. Clad in a modern coat of whitewash and closely shouldered by modern buildings, it is used now as a municipal lodging house for the poor. One John Lesley was master in Witherspoon's boyhood, and during his rough and ready régime the school was typical of its kind and age. Scholars were drilled in the conventional elements of mathematics, English, and the classics, the only relief to the monotonous curriculum being the performance of plays on certain occasions, the epilogue and prologue once being written by none other than Allan Ramsay, the Shepherd Poet. Cock fights were a common sport; but the great event in the school year was the football match on Fastern's Even, in which masters and scholars all joined—the latter rejoicing savagely in their one well-earned opportunity to square accounts with their tyrannous pedagogues.

At this school, spurred on by parental admonition, young Witherspoon paid strict attention to his studies and by degrees acquired among his fellows a reputation for soundness of judgment and mental alertness due more rightly perhaps to the seriousness of his home training, and when at the age of thirteen he was pronounced ready for the University he was considered advanced for his age.

According to his own statement made to Ashbel Green in later years he understood Latin and Greek and French at this time as

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well as he ever did; but his youthfulness on entering the University was not extraordinary; David Hume and Principal Robertson both entered at eleven, Thomas Reid and James Beattie, the philosophers, at twelve and fourteen respectively. Destined as he was for the ministry there was but little glamor attached to his entrance into university life. It merely meant another step toward the goal set up before him, and if his heart burned with any imaginings they probably were only of the time when he should look down from the eminence of a pulpit upon the upturned faces of a listening congregation.

The arts course at Edinburgh in those days theoretically extended through four years, the first being spent in Latin, the second in Greek, the third in Logic, and the fourth in Natural Philosophy. In addition there were professors of mathematics and moral philosophy, attendance on whose lectures was optional. Thirty-odd years before, the tutorial system, whereby a professor led his pupils through the various years and finally saw them graduated, had given way to the professorial system whereby each lecturer was concerned principally with his own subject and it became nobody's business to bring the students up to graduation. They attended what courses they pleased and graduation fell into disregard. In 1704, for example, sixty-five came up for their degree, and 104 in 1705, while in 1749 the number had dropped to three. When Witherspoon went up to Edinburgh some trace of the old tutorial system was lingering in the custom of matriculating under a given professor; and so it happens that in the manuscript book of matriculations for 1704-1762 preserved in the university archives, under the formidable heading "Discipuli Domini Johanni Stevenson qui subscripserunt die vicesimo-sexto mensis Februarii MDCCXXXVI" may still be seen the already formed and unmistakable signature "Jo. Witherspoon." His handwriting at this time is the best evidence of his maturity.¹⁴

¹⁴ In the Witherspoon Collection in the Library of Princeton University is the Horace (Utrecht, 1713) he purchased shortly before matriculation, bearing his autograph on the title-page, and on the fly-leaf this entry also in his hand: "Joannes Wederspan (written over the name *Witherspoon*) est hujus Liber Legitimus Possesor Februarii Die quarto An: Dom: Milesimo septingentismo trigesimosexto." This autograph is the earliest example of his habit of writing his name on the title-page of each book in his library.

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Whatever one may think of the faculty of Edinburgh University at that time—and the general opinion is that it was made up of men able in their day like Drummond in Greek, and Stewart in natural philosophy, but now past their prime—the young student could scarcely have chosen a more inspiring instructor than Professor Stevenson. Even Alexander Carlyle grows almost enthusiastic about him. He was one of the most successful teachers of his day. Logic was the chief subject of his professorship but rhetoric had been added to it and for many years remained a part of his field of instruction, and it has been said that no one in a chair at Edinburgh did more to turn men to the love of letters. It should be remembered that English at this time was still a written and not a spoken language in Scotland. Even by the middle of the century there was plenty of work for tutors in English pronunciation. Charles Townshend, the English statesman, attending a meeting of the Select Society of Edinburgh is alleged to have slyly suggested that the Society employ an interpreter for the benefit of visitors like himself. Professor Stevenson had occupied his chair but six years when Witherspoon became his pupil; he was still in his full vigor and enthusiasm, and had not yet become the venerable figure of the touching scene depicted in Graham's *Scottish Men of Letters*.¹⁵ His influence was the strongest, outside of family circles, that the future president of Princeton carried with him through life. Years after, when a striking similarity was noticed between Dr. Witherspoon's lectures on composition and taste and Hugh Blair's lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres, the President declared to Ashbel Green that he had never exchanged a word with his college-mate, the future rhetorician, and Dr. Green suggests with every probability of correctness that the similarity of their views was due to their common education under Professor Stevenson. To the latter's teaching may surely be traced President Witherspoon's love of good literature, his insistence on form and style, his interest in the English language, and the influence that he subsequently exerted in these directions in America.

For a village boy like him, however, in whose veins good blood was flowing but who had never enjoyed the opportunity of city

¹⁵p. 100.

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life, residence at the capital should have exerted influences in some ways perhaps more potent, because more subtle, than even association with a rare character like Stevenson. That keen-witted combination of worldliness and piety, Alexander Carlyle, recognized these subtle influences and made the most of them—the historic traditions of the city, the benefit of meeting the world, the cultivation of taste, and the gaining of “a certain manner and address that can only be obtained at the capital.” John Witherspoon would not have considered Carlyle’s “manner and address” ideally ministerial; but it is probable that he never recognized the latent qualities and values of urban atmosphere. Tradition, and the romance of life in an historic city, never caught his sympathies. His sober upbringing had made him old beyond his years; he had never known the golden age; almost at a bound he had leaped from infancy into the full noon of life; since the time he had recited his prayers at his mother’s knee he had been trained to remember that he was a minister’s oldest son and that on his shoulders before long would fall his father’s mantle; it was serious business this matter of preparing himself for such a responsibility, and little or nothing else engaged his attention while at the University. Here in part is to be sought the explanation of the sober strain that marked his character.

The university buildings at Edinburgh were wretched, looking more like almshouses than halls of learning; they were “low and ruinous,” consisting of ancient dwellings remodelled into lecture halls; classrooms were small, dark, and low ceilinged.¹⁶ Living was cheap and good; but plain though it was it did not produce high scholarship; application to study seems to have been unfashionable. Dr. Erskine in his funeral sermon on Principal Robertson gives the impression that the University at this time abounded with youths of conspicuous talent and “indefatigable application to study.” The youths and their talents were there, and in a handful of cases there were indications of application to study, but evidence of a general interest in the major purpose of a university career is lacking.

Dr. Witherspoon has left no recollections of his undergraduate

¹⁶ Principal Robertson in Graham, *Social Life in Scotland*, vol. II, p. 206.

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days and our only actual knowledge of them is derived from Dr. Carlyle's autobiography. The two students lodged together in the same house, halfway down the Lawnmarket. With them were John (afterwards Colonel) and Alexander Maxwell, while Sir Harry Nisbet and John Dalrymple (afterwards Sir John of Cranstoun) used to come in to prepare their work with Carlyle's tutor. There were no better names than these on the university rolls and it may be assumed, therefore that young Witherspoon's social standing was unassailable. He took virtually the same studies as Carlyle though not always under the same instructor, and in view of his subsequent academic work in America we may glance for a moment at the course of study they pursued.

Carlyle's recollection is that the first year was spent in the humanities class under Professor Kerr, continuing his Latin and beginning higher mathematics with Euclid. Being an exceptional Greek student he seems to have dropped that subject. In his second year besides continuing mathematics with Professor McLaurin and attending Kerr's private Latin class in which Juvenal and Tacitus were read and the "beauties and peculiarities of the Latin tongue were opened up," he joined Professor Stevenson's class in logic and rhetoric, reading at 8 a.m., Aristotle's *Poetics* and Longinus *On the Sublime*, and at 11 a.m., Heineccius' *Logic* and an abridgement of Locke's *Essay*. At 2 p.m., Stevenson read to his class a "compendious history" of ancient philosophy. Examination or quizzes in all subjects were held thrice a week. Carlyle took French instead of Greek, and during the session the class advanced so well that its members learned to read French easily, and actually prepared Molière's *Médecin malgré lui* for performance on the college stage, though the play was not given. Young Witherspoon, as we have seen, had learned French before coming to Edinburgh. His father is said to have been a close student of the French Calvinist writers and from him the boy received his knowledge of the language.

In his third year at the University, besides continuing McLaurin's mathematics and Kerr's private Latin class, Carlyle attended Sir Robert Stewart's lectures on natural philosophy and took up dancing, the *Spectator* having recently led his father to think that a course in dancing would make him more graceful in

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the pulpit. Young Witherspoon, however, being a minister's son of the stricter sort, was not allowed to use this interesting but profane method of acquiring the grace that his Creator had neglected to give him.

The fourth year was spent in moral philosophy and mathematics, to which McLaurin was adding astronomy and a course of experiments in mechanics, with a few general lectures in natural philosophy to make up the deficiencies of Sir Robert Stewart's course, deficiencies due to the old age of the professor. Carlyle then joined the class in divinity and found the professors very "dull and Dutch and prolix." They formed no school of theology but preferred to allow their students to do their own thinking, a practice which is adduced as the reason for the advanced views and liberal accomplishments of the younger Scottish clergy of the time. A sixth year having been spent in divinity, finally in his seventh winter at Edinburgh Carlyle delivered a Latin discourse and was graduated in theology.

In general, this course was the one followed by Witherspoon though with one marked difference at the conclusion of its undergraduate portion. The University, as has been said, had abandoned the tutorial system for the professorial or lecture system, with the result that each student attended only such lectures as he pleased, and graduation with its attendant Master's degree had come to be considered of no importance. In November, 1738, Witherspoon and four fellow students, one of whom was Hugh Blair, represented to Principal Wishart and some of the professors that they desired to receive their degrees and to that end were willing to print theses and defend them in public. Grasping at any idea howsoever novel or even revolutionary to rescue graduation from its discredit, the authorities, far from resenting this undergraduate suggestion, willingly agreed to allow their petitioners to earn their degrees as proposed; and in order to encourage others to adopt the same course they further agreed to remit for such students certain university fees. On February 23, 1739, accordingly, in the university common hall before a large audience attracted by the novelty of the occasion, each of the five theses in Latin was defended by its author and impugned by the other four candidates. Witherspoon's dissertation of twelve

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quarto pages had for its subject *De Mentis Immortalitate* and was dedicated to the Marquis of Tweeddale. The most remarkable thing about the production in modern eyes would probably be the fact that its author had just passed his sixteenth birthday. On February 26, 1739, three years to a day from the date of his matriculation, he was laureated Master of Arts.

Of his personality at this period Dr. Carlyle's autobiography, which is again our only source of information, says that although he was a good scholar and a very sensible and shrewd boy, yet he had a disagreeable temper, a flat voice, and an awkward manner, "which prevented his making an impression on his companions of either sex that was at all adequate to his ability." Carlyle further asserts that these defects remained with him and so roused his envy that they forced him to "take a road to distinction very different from that of his more successful companions."

It is generally agreed that President Witherspoon's voice was poor, and that he was not a graceful speaker; and it is also true that his road to distinction was different from that of his college-mates. But Carlyle's implication that his removal to America was due to envy is altogether erroneous. Whatever one's opinion as to the comparative success of his career and those of his contemporaries at the University of Edinburgh, one fact this book, it is believed, will render finally incontrovertible—Dr. Witherspoon did not leave Scotland because of jealousy nor because he felt himself to be a prophet without honor in his own land.

On receiving his degree he remained at Edinburgh to pursue his theological studies. These he might have completed in three years and thus have received at nineteen a licence to preach, but either on the advice of his father and friends, or in deference to a rule of the Assembly which opposed such early licensure, he continued as a student over four years. Carlyle again supplies a glimpse of him here. It was the custom of divinity students of the University and the younger ministers of the district to spend their summer in East Lothian and generally to assemble at Had-dington on presbytery day. Finding presbytery dinners too dreary, with their strictly limited supply of wine—two bottles for the whole company—these young men got into the habit of hiring a room for themselves at another tavern and meeting there ear-

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ly in the afternoon, and with other ministers dropping in, used to keep up until bedtime what they called an "enlightened conversation." The discussions we are told were entirely theological and philosophical, but there was as might be expected more freedom and friendliness than at the sedater presbytery gatherings. Witherspoon never failed to be one of the company, continues Carlyle; but the latter's impression of his fellow student at this time is no pleasanter than the earlier one. To the free and easy autobiographer Witherspoon seemed "close, and suspicious, and jealous, and always aspiring to a superiority that he was not able to maintain." The accuracy of this impression is impeached by Carlyle's admission that he remained on intimate terms with him and was glad enough to continue his visits to Gifford to spend the days fishing and the evenings with sisters and cousins. In return he used to invite his alleged disagreeable companion to his own home at Prestonpans. The society of the fair sex Witherspoon "loved of all things," says Carlyle, and at Prestonpans he had greater opportunity to enjoy it because there were more girls, "and no restraint from an austere father," so that sixty years later, Carlyle, thinking it over, considers the "austerity of manners and aversion to social joy" which he asserts Witherspoon subsequently affected, were the "arts of hypocrisy and ambition; for he had a strong and enlightened understanding far above enthusiasm and a temper that did not seem liable to it." Whatever that last sentence may mean, one cannot help suspecting that Carlyle's entire recollection is controlled first by disapproval of Witherspoon's course in the church of Scotland, secondly by hostility to his American career, and finally by ignorance of the fact that for many years he was the victim of a nervous complaint which compelled him to keep the strictest check on himself. As a young man he could not have been altogether the churlish individual that the description implies, and Carlyle's acknowledged friendship with him during these years is the best proof thereof. Dr. Witherspoon's American contemporaries found him a distinctly sociable person, and to his death he retained the warmest friendships even in Scotland. The truth seems to be that Carlyle and Witherspoon were as different types of men as ever studied for the same profession. The one was bril-

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preacher might be best argument of the settlement." This unusual procedure resulted in Witherspoon receiving the call in January, 1745, signed by a large majority of the heritors and elders, and consented to by a large number of heads of families. But before he could be ordained, a protest was lodged against him on the score of unorthodoxy. It was decided to proceed with his trials and in March they were heard at Irvine, when he defended once more the principles of his precocious Edinburgh thesis which seems to have been the *casus belli*. Meeting approval, and no further objection being raised to his "Doctrine, Life, or Conversation," the date of his ordination was set for April 11, 1745. Thus at last, a young minister of 22, he found himself in charge of a parish that dated back to the Reformation, in a neighborhood full of romance and historic interest, yielding an annual stipend of seventeen pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence, and seventy-nine bolls of meal, with a glebe of thirty-one acres hard by the village.¹⁷

But no parish, however romantic in associations and generous in salary, could have entirely absorbed this vigorous young Scot. Already he was developing into a man whose interests were not bounded by his daily tasks, but to whom were coming calls to activity other than that for which he received a salary. He assumed charge of his parish the victor in an ecclesiastical skirmish; he had not been there six months before he found himself in a far more realistic fray, and not victorious.

When in 1745 the invasion by the Young Pretender threw the country into excitement, the loyal presbyteries of the Church of Scotland did not hesitate to consider the matter in their sessions and the majority passed resolutions similar to those that were entered on the records of the Presbytery of Irvine. There we read that on January 7, 1746, after spending considerable time in prayer, the Presbytery proposed to follow the example of other presbyteries and agree upon a method of signaling their abhorrence of the rebellion:

Upon which the Presbytery unanimously Resolved, primo, to do all in their power for influencing such as are within their Bounds to exert

¹⁷ Sir John Sinclair, *Statistical Account of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1793, vol. VIII, p. 316.

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themselves in support of the present Government; Secundo, That they will in conjunction with their own parishes contribute for raising some Volunteers for that purpose if it be found necessary; Tertio, if the Duke of Cumberland shall come to Scotland, They will, on being informed thereof, meet to appoint some to wait upon him,

and a committee was appointed to notify the other members of the meeting.

Needing only some such ecclesiastical countenance as this, the young pastor, whose ancestral fighting blood had been stirring within him since the first news of the rebellion, drew up on behalf of the owners and tenants of the barony of Broadstone in his parish, a subscription paper for the purpose of defraying the expenses of a party of Beith militia, at the head of which he proposed to march to Stirling to join the royal forces, "for the support of our religion and liberty, and in defence of our only rightful, and lawful Sovereign, King George, against his enemies engaged in the present rebellion."¹⁸

The amount he collected was eighty-eight pounds fifteen shillings, and the militia men, to the number of about a hundred and fifty, were engaged to serve thirty days from the date of their departure from Beith. But on reaching Glasgow, they were informed by the military authorities that their services would not be needed and that they might retrace the twenty miles home. Nevertheless their leader did not propose to go thus far and have the experience come to naught. Dismissing his little band, he pushed on to the scene of conflict, accompanied by his beadle bearing a trusty sword, still preserved and dearly prized by that gentleman's descendants. And on January 17, 1746, these two indispensable officers of the parish of Beith appeared as spectators at the battle of Falkirk. It was no fault of the minister that he was not a participant in the fray, and his companion was evidently not less willing; but he had only himself to thank for the predicament in which he fell before the day was done. The warlike accoutrement of the devoted beadle gave the lie to the min-

¹⁸ *Cochrane Correspondence*, p. 120 (Maitland Club Publications) Glasgow, 1836. It is said that the preamble is in Mr. Witherspoon's handwriting; a receipt for part of the money collected is signed by him.

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ister's clerical garb; and, on suspicion, the Reverend Mr. Witherspoon was seized by the Pretender's forces. For a week he was carried hither and yon until, on the twenty-fifth of January, with ten other civilians and five members of an Edinburgh company of volunteers, he was put into Castle Doune, near Stirling, as a prisoner of war. The castle was already in ruinous condition but at the top of the western tower, under the battlements, a "large, ghastly room" was found in which the prisoners were placed. At one end of the apartment were two recesses, one of which Witherspoon and the volunteers, with two Aberdonians taken as spies and threatened with halts, used as a sleeping-room. The second cell was occupied by the other seven persons who also declared that they too had come to Falkirk merely to witness the battle. Straw and blankets purchased in the village were the sole furniture the prisoners had at their disposal. Being allowed by their Highland guards to climb up on the battlements the volunteers decided to attempt escape by making a rope of their blankets and the Aberdonians agreed to join in the attempt. Mr. Witherspoon prudently declared he would see how they fared and if they were successful would probably follow. Lots were drawn for the order of descent and about one o'clock on the last night of the month, by bright moonlight the party began their effort. The first four got down safely, but the fifth "who was very tall and big, coming down in a hurry, the rope broke with him just as his feet touched the ground." The next man persisted in going down notwithstanding, and boldly dropped the twenty or thirty feet that the rope now lacked, fell on his companions, broke several ribs, and dislocated an ankle. This party got away safely, carrying the injured man to the house of a friendly farmer. The seventh had even worse luck. Seeing the accident he pulled up the rope, repaired it with blankets still left and then started down. All would have gone well had he not so thickened the rope against mischance that when he came to the repaired section his hands slipped and he fell to the ground sustaining such injuries that he shortly after died from the effects. Mr. Witherspoon did not make the venture, and a few days later his prudence received its reward in his release. The whole experi-

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ery, daughter of Robert Montgomery of Craig House, near Beith. She was twenty-seven and he twenty-five years of age.¹⁹

¹⁹There were ten children by this marriage: (1) Anne or Ann, born at Beith, July 23, 1749, died April 1, 1817, at Princeton, N. J.; (2) Christian, a daughter, born at Beith, August 13, baptised August 14, 1750, died at Beith, December 10, 1756; (3) James, born at Beith, November 17, 1751, died at Germantown, Pa., October 4, 1777; (4) Robert, born at Beith, April 3, 1753, died at Beith, July 1754; (5) Barbara, born at Beith, February 18, baptised February 20, 1756, died at Paisley, August 1, 1763; (6) John, born and baptised at Beith, July 29, 1757, died at sea, 1795(?); (7) Frances, born at Paisley, August 16, baptised August 26, 1759, died December 14, 1784 at Charleston, S. C.; (8) David, born at Paisley, September 22, baptised September 27, 1760, died 1801; (9) George, born at Paisley, March, died at Paisley, July 27, 1762; (10) a son still-born at Paisley, June 16, 1763. Parish manuscript records of Beith and Paisley.

CHAPTER TWO

TWENTY YEARS IN THE SCOTTISH CHURCH

PRESIDENT Witherspoon's twenty years of aggressive life in the Church of Scotland can scarcely be estimated without some understanding of the conditions prevailing in that body when he entered its councils. He came on the scene at the opening of a new age in Scotland—an age which, as Professor Mathieson has pointed out, was no less remarkable on its secular side for the industrial awakening of the country than notable on the ecclesiastical side for the brilliant though short-lived triumph of liberalism, and for the sudden outburst of literary activity which was at least one reflection of that triumph and which must remain the unchallenged boast of Scottish historians.¹

With the industrial awakening he was not immediately concerned. His interest lay in the spread of liberalism and the ensuing decadence of spirituality. But he was not blind to the literary efflorescence that marks the middle of the eighteenth century in Scotland, since the most famous names in that movement were also those of leaders in the contemporary liberal or Moderate party in the church, whose eager antagonist he became. It is an interesting fact, noted by Professor Mathieson and paralleled in literary histories other than Scotland's, that the men who carried those names were born very nearly together—Hugh Blair the critic and rhetorician, in 1718, Robertson the historian and Smollett the novelist, in 1721, John Home the poet, in 1722, Adam Smith the economist, in 1723. The exception was David Hume who was seven years older than Blair. The latter and John Home were prominent members of the Moderate party of which Robertson became the leader; while to Witherspoon, probably the brainiest man in the Popular party, as the opponents of the Moderates were called, fell the distinction of heading the opposition.

When, in 1747, Witherspoon sat for the first time in St. Giles as a member of the General Assembly, Francis Hutcheson, the

¹ W. L. Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland*, Glasgow, 1910, preface.

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philosopher whom he was to handle so severely later and who was to remain his favorite object of attack, had but recently died, leaving behind him the fruitful memory of brilliant lectures whose easy optimism, born of the Earl of Shaftesbury's teachings, was revolutionizing religious thought and life among the younger generation of ministers; Hume had issued his *Essays Moral and Political* and was reading the proofs of his *Essay concerning the Human Understanding*; John Home was writing his first tragedy; Robertson was filling notebooks with materials for his first historical work; Adam Ferguson, as chaplain of the Black Watch, was not yet the popular lecturer on ethics but was gaining first hand acquaintance with that civil society whose historian he was to become; Hugh Blair was beginning to draw crowds to hear his polished discourses—discourses that Dr. Samuel Johnson declared he loved, even though their “dog of an author” was a “Scotchman and a presbyterian and everything he should not be;” Adam Smith was lecturing on literature but musing over the principles he was soon to lay down in his *Wealth of Nations*; and Thomas Reid was preparing to publish his *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, the philosophy of which Witherspoon was to be the leading early exponent in America. Remembered now chiefly as historic milestones in the progress of human intelligence, these names and others like them² show that literary activity was in the air, that a creative spirit was abroad, in other words that Moderatism in this respect was only another expression of the general stir of intellectual liberty of the eighteenth century.

But the vitality of a Church is not to be estimated by its output of literature, least of all if that literature be almost entirely secular. It was the effect of this activity on the ancient spirit of the Church that called into life the criticism of the conservative Popular party—and this was the party with which by birth, by early training, and by conviction Dr. Witherspoon on entering the Church allied himself. He had no quarrel with good literature—he had listened to John Stevenson too attentively for that; but he refused to admit that the pulpit was the place for its exploitation.

² Fuller lists may be found in Mathieson and Grahame.

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By fostering a taste for refinement and polite learning, and by substituting the preaching of a pure morality for doctrinal and evangelistic sermons, Professor Hutcheson, according to some critics,³ had attempted to make the Church a more attractive career for the sons of the upper classes who had been steadily deserting it for other walks in life. But in the eyes of the older generation he had succeeded only in sensualizing and degrading the ancient teachings and in producing a type of younger ministers who were sadly different from their fathers.

Witherspoon, in a satire presently to be noticed, attacked the general influence of Hutcheson, and held up to ridicule the contemporary tendency toward intellectual superficiality. He had heard a clergyman say that any student might get in six weeks as much divinity as he would ever need; everything was now "more compendiously taught, and more superficially understood, than formerly. . . . In the very mechanic arts, laborious diligence gives way to elegance and ease. . . . Every year gives us a shorter method of learning some branch of knowledge. In short, in these last days the quintessence of everything has been extracted, and is presented us, as it were, in little phials. . . . Agreeable to all this, have we not seen," he asked, "many students of divinity, brought up in hot-beds, who have become speakers in General Assemblies, and strenuous supporters of a falling church, before their beards were grown, to the perfect astonishment of an observing world."

It seems harsh to say, as Professor Mathieson implies, that the Popular party proposed to saddle the awakening energies of Scottish literature and art with the incubus of theological nightmare and the fanaticism of an earlier age.⁴ Witherspoon's party believed that sermons should be more than graceful expositions of morality, or opportunities for quotations of poetry, and that the Christian Church and especially that branch to which he belonged, irrevocably stood for certain great dogmas which no amount of progress, intellectual or material, and no hunger however keen for literature could permit ministers of the Church to ignore in their pulpits. It was this ignoring or glossing of fun-

³ e.g., McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, pp. 67, 82.

⁴ Mathieson, p. 199.

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damental dogmas and the general lowering of the ancient standards of personal conduct that shocked the stauncher adherents of orthodox faith. In other words, once more was being fought the eternal feud between the old and the new, between the ancient theology, the fanaticism if one insists, of a sterner generation and the newer, more comfortable philosophy of a more cultured age. The ministers of the new school were looked upon with suspicion; they were called not unfairly "paganized Christian divines;" it is even admitted that as a class they were humanists rather than divines, citizens rather than churchmen, men of the world rather than dogmatic preachers.⁵

On the other hand as Dr. McCosh⁶ remarks it must also be admitted that their opponents, the evangelicals of the Popular party, in opposing the culture and liberal sentiments of the Moderates came perilously near to proving themselves incapable of appreciating the apostle's command to follow whatsoever things are true and honest, just and pure, lovely and of good report. The difficulty was that they could not see any trace of these qualities in the Moderate preaching and manner of life.

But Moderatism had another side. Not only was it allied to the intellectual spirit of the times, not only was it productive of relaxed personal religious life and a more complacent attitude toward fundamental Presbyterian doctrine, but it was an ecclesiastical policy whose chief instrument was the enforcement of the obnoxious law of patronage. This was the law that placed the disposition of church livings in the hands of patrons. The patronage party was growing stronger each year as more ministers, who were accepted beneficiaries of the system, came into the Assembly,⁷ while the people on the other hand were growing more obstinate for what they claimed to be their right to choose their own spiritual shepherds. Each session of the Assembly, therefore, became the scene of debate and oratory that in brilliance compared favorably, so we are told, with the speaking in the Houses of Parliament at London. But at synod meetings the surround-

⁵ Mathieson, pp. 197, 240.

⁶ *Scottish Philosophy*, p. 87.

⁷ In 1769 the number of benefices in the Scottish Church exceeded 900. Mathieson, p. 146.

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ings were less imposing and proceedings less decorous. Samuel Davies, the trustee and later president of the College of New Jersey, was a visitor at the meeting of the Synod of Lothian and Tweedale in the spring of 1754 and comments in his diary on the "prodigious ferment" of the session, expressing his surprise and grief at the altercations, the "intolerably severe reflections" passed, and the "inhumanity and persecution" he witnessed; there appeared to be, said he, but little of the spirit of serious Christianity among the younger clergy. The effect of the struggle that was going on fell most heavily of course on the parishes themselves. Not only are the minutes of the General Assembly and of the Synods for that period records of bitter wrangles and of tactics that savor more of ward politics than churchly procedure, but much of the contemporary history of Scottish parishes reveals a state of affairs little short of amazing. We read of ministers forced on parishes by aid of armed soldiery, of bloody riots at attempted inductions, of heresy charges discouraged, of ministers guilty of immoralities going unpunished while others were deposed for obedience to conscientious scruples against countenancing inductions unwanted by parishes. One has but to glance over the pages of a volume like Graham's *Scottish Men of Letters of the Eighteenth Century*, or Dr. Carlyle's *Autobiography* to feel that, whatever the rank and file of the clergy were doing, many if not most of the ablest and most prominent ministers of the day were leading lives scarcely marked by what the world ordinarily understands as piety. And yet these were the men whose writings undeniably added lustre to Scotland's name. There seems just ground, therefore, for the criticisms of the Popular party.

The Moderates advocated the supremacy of church authority and the strict exercise of the Church's judicial powers, and in the Assembly at Edinburgh upheld the steady support of the law of patronage, while in Parliament at Westminster they petitioned for its repeal. Patronage had long been unpopular. By an Act of 1592 the patron of a vacant parish could present to the presbytery any person duly qualified as a minister, and the presbytery was compelled to ordain and settle him after certain trials and examinations had been undergone, and provided there were no

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technical objections to his personal character and doctrine. The fate of Presbyterianism during the Restoration developed a spirit of independence which made it difficult for ministers, after the Revolution of 1689 had restored Presbyterianism and patronage, to return to the old order of things. Appreciating the new feeling, the church courts did not altogether disregard the law but contrived to render it largely ineffectual by declaring that a presentee must have a "call" from the parish before he could accept the charge, and the whole attitude of the Church grew to be, in the words of Dugald Stewart, one that "implied a greater respect for the call than the presentation." The call did not have to be unanimous nor even that of a majority. Each case seems to have depended on the strength and violence of the opposition; and favoring the opposition, presbyteries were sometimes declining to settle appointees even in the face of orders from their synods.

The crying need of better stipends and the refusal of Parliament to give this need consideration because of the laxness of the Scottish Church in its observance of the law, led the younger group of Moderates to advocate and enforce a tightening of the reins of government; and although the people as a whole opposed the policy, the Moderate party built up a majority in the Assembly which carried out the policy under the leadership of William Robertson, subsequently principal of the University of Edinburgh, and the historian. The policy was highhanded, but highhandedness is often not far from statesmanship. It has been said that Dr. Robertson was a man who seldom made a joke and never a blunder; and Raeburn's portrait of him at the University is in full accord with whatever truth lies in the saying. There are the clear, calm, calculating eyes with their steady unsmiling gaze, the long lean nose, the thin dry lips; even the slender hand drooping idly over the chair arm has something steel-like in its suppleness and clean-cut strength; it is what one imagines the hand of an ecclesiastic and statesman should be. This was the man who declared that if the will of the majority in the Assembly was to be openly flouted, and temporizing was to take the place of obedience, the result would inevitably be chaos and disintegration, and the Church would be exposed to the contempt

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and scorn of the world as a church without union, order, or discipline, destitute of strength to support its own constitution and falling into ruins by the abuse of liberty.⁸

Dr. Robertson's policy triumphed; it brought order into the Church; it crushed the revolt of the presbyteries, and for a while at least it silenced popular clamor. With its ultimate fate at the close of the century we are not here concerned; but even in the golden days of its supremacy it gradually alienated masses of people from the Establishment. By 1765, three years after Robertson openly assumed the leadership he had tacitly held for ten, and three years before Witherspoon left Scotland for good, the number of dissenters from the Establishment had grown to more than 100,000 with 1200 churches of their own.

It will have been gathered that Dr. Robertson's opponents in the Popular party were the more austere in dogma, more evangelical in the pulpit, more tender of the early piety; they fought against the blind operation of patronage, against the forcing of ministers on people who did not want them; they fought for the right of personal conscience. And at the same time that Robertson was assuming virtual though as yet unacknowledged leadership of the Moderates, Dr. Witherspoon was coming to be regarded as the champion of the Popular or orthodox party. One cannot be very wide of the mark in seeing in his enlistment on the side of the people in this slow ecclesiastical contest some presage and explanation of the attitude he was to take in the coming political struggle on the other side of the Atlantic. His attitude was already that of the American, Samuel Davies, who under date of June 15, 1754, writes in his diary:

I find a great number of the clergy and laity have of late carried church-power to an extravagant height, denying to individuals the right of judging for themselves, and insisting upon absolute universal obedience to all the determinations of the general Assembly. I heard sundry speeches in the House on this head which really surprised me. The nobility and gentry who are lay-elders, are generally high flyers; and have encroached upon the rights of the people, especially as to the choice of their own ministers. Violent settlements are enjoined by the authority of the General Assembly and there is no prospect of redress.

⁸Quoted by Dugald Stewart.

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The two parties were brought face to face in what is known in Scottish ecclesiastical history as the Gillespie case, in which Mr. Thomas Gillespie, minister at Carnock, was deposed in May, 1752, by the General Assembly for allowing his conscientious scruples to keep him away from the ordination of a Mr. Andrew Richardson at Inverkeithing. The ordination had been strongly opposed by the people of the parish, and owing to this opposition the presbytery of Dumferline, to which Inverkeithing belonged, had refused to ordain Mr. Richardson, who had thereupon appealed to the Assembly. The case had come before the Assembly commission or standing committee, and after a brisk fight the presbytery had been ordered to carry out the ordination. This the presbytery did not do and at the March, 1752, meeting of the commission the issue was fairly met as to how far members of inferior judicatories were bound to give effect to the sentences of superior courts in opposition to the dictates of their private judgment and conscience. Manifestos embodying the principles at stake were issued by both sides. The Moderates asserted that the presbytery had not carried out the commission's injunction, a fact which was promptly acknowledged. But when a vote of censure was put, the Moderates could not control a majority and the vote failed of passage. Thereupon they gave notice that they would protest to the Assembly itself and would publish their *Reasons for Dissent* from the commission's failure to censure. The Popular majority at once appointed a committee to draw up their *Answers to the Reasons for Dissent*. The two pamphlets duly appeared, and for those who are sufficiently interested in Scottish ecclesiastical history to wish to examine in detail the differences between the two parties, these manifestos are among the earliest and most authoritative as well as the most eloquent expositions of the principles under controversy. Dr. Robertson is believed to have written the manifesto of the Moderates, while Dr. Witherspoon, though not a member of the committee in charge, was mainly responsible for that of the Popular party. In the Assembly that May, Robertson carried the day, and when a scapegoat was sought on whom the new policy of vigorous rebuke should be inflicted, Mr. Gillespie, a devout and innocuous member of the rebellious presbytery, was deposed for disobedi-

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ence to the mandate of the Assembly. By many the action was considered unwarranted and cruel. Sermons were preached on it; prayers were offered on the issue involved; the case was discussed in every presbytery, and synod, and manse; and an unsuccessful effort was made to reinstate the victim.

Dr. Robertson's ascendancy had now begun. Until his time none but men of advanced age and established reputation rose to address the Assembly unless called on by the moderator. This tacit closure deterred if it did not actually prevent younger men from speaking. Before the meeting of the Assembly of 1751 Robertson, Carlyle, Home, Blair, and others at a secret conclave had resolved to fight leniency in a case of censure, and when the case came up Robertson broke through the ice of tradition and unbidden by the moderator addressed the Assembly and was followed by the other younger men of his side. From that moment we are told debate became freer and keener. Dr. Witherspoon's reference to beardless divinity students speaking in the General Assembly has already been mentioned; it was not misunderstood in the General Assembly.

He had come strongly into prominence for the first time by preaching that year's annual sermon before the Lord High Commissioner. The opportunity to strike a blow for the Popular party was approaching. Early in 1753 appeared an anonymous pamphlet entitled *A Just View of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland* defending the Assembly's action in the Gillespie case and vindicating the policy of the Moderates. It purported to represent a certain set of ministers as agitators of the people and as acting not on conscience but on love of popularity. It was asserted in the pamphlet that Mr. Gillespie's presbytery was supported and countenanced in its disobedience by ministers who had little or no claim to esteem and it was hinted that the action of the commissioners in not censuring "was manufactured in a certain place and by certain hands, while others were employed as the dupes to propose and support it." Vague though the allusion was it was generally conceded to be aimed at Dr. Alexander Webster of Edinburgh, an orthodox leader, and a warm friend of Witherspoon, as the "manufacturer," and at Witherspoon himself as one of the "dupes." The latter had been a close observer of

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the state of affairs in the Church, and as we have seen had already taken his stand. He had further been revolving in his mind a sketch of the various parties in religion and learning in Scotland, but this notion had gradually faded during 1751 and 1752 before the conviction that religious interest was waning in the churches, and moreover that a public neglect of religion was resulting from the abuse of church authority in the rebuking and disposition of ministers who did not think themselves in conscience at liberty to assist in the ordination of pastors who had no willing people. Perceiving how the wind was blowing in the General Assembly, he resolved to attack the other side with the subtler weapon of ridicule by publishing a satirical description of its policy and methods, and in May, 1753, he had intended to put forth a half sheet of "moderate" maxims under the ironical title of *A List of Self Evident Truths*. But the appearance of the attack on Dr. Webster and himself led him to give up his original plan and to expand his "List" into a pamphlet of *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* which was published anonymously at Glasgow.⁹

Moderation, the author declares in a preliminary paragraph, is an excellent thing and particularly the noblest character of a churchman; and it is no small presage of the glorious and blessed state of the Church that so many of our young men are "smitten with love of moderation and generally burn with desire to appear in that noble and divine character." This has inspired him with the ambition of training up in this most useful of all sciences as many as desire it. But there is no complete system of moderation in print. He had "earnestly intreated several of the most eminent men of the moderate stamp among us, those burning and shining lights of our Church," to undertake the preparation of such a guide; but one and all were "so busied in acting moderation, that they could not have time to write upon it." Besides what would become of us "if any of the expert steersmen of this ecclesiastical vessel of ours should retire from the helm?" Hence he will proceed with the task himself and enumerate all the maxims upon which moderate men conduct themselves, with an "illustration

⁹The introduction to the Glasgow edition of 1754 states that the first edition appeared in October, 1753. The essay was noticed, however, in the September issue of the *Scots Magazine*, (vol. XV, p. 472).

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and confirmation” of each. He warns his readers that he will make but very little use of Scripture, because “that is contrary to some of the maxims themselves.”

Maxim I lays down the fundamental proposition that “All ecclesiastical persons, of whatever rank, whether principals of colleges, professors of divinity, ministers, or even probationers, that are suspected of heresy are to be esteemed men of great genius, vast learning, and uncommon worth; and are by all means to be supported and protected.” The discussion of this opening broadside is full of direct hits; of which the casual remark that “I never knew moderate men in my life that did not love and honor a heretic,” may be taken as a specimen.

Maxim II declares that “When any man is charged with loose practices or tendencies to immorality, he is to be screened and protected as much as possible; especially if the faults laid to his charge be, as they are incomparably well termed in a sermon preached by a hopeful youth that made some noise lately, ‘good humoured vices.’”

Maxim IV states the rules for the moderate preacher; his subjects must be confined to social duties; he must recommend them only from natural considerations, viz., the beauty and comely proportions of virtue, and its advantage in the present life, without any regard to a future state of more extended self interest; his authorities must be drawn from heathen writers, none, or as few as possible, from Scripture, and finally he must be very unacceptable to the common people.

Maxim VI asserts that “It is not only unnecessary for a moderate man to have much learning, but he ought to be filled with a contempt of all kinds of learning but one, which is, to understand Leibnitz’s scheme well; the chief parts of which are so beautifully painted and so harmoniously sung by Lord Shaftesbury, and which have been so well licked into form and method by the late immortal Mr. Hutcheson.” These references to authorities gives Mr. Witherspoon the opportunity to “subjoin a short catalogue of the most necessary and useful books, the thorough understanding of which will make a truly learned moderate man.” To give further proof of his deep concern for the edifica-

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tion of ingenuous youth, he has extracted "the sum and substance of the above library" and presents it to the world "under a name which is not without a meaning, though not intelligible to all"—his "Athenian Creed," which is worth quoting in full:

I believe in the beauty and comely proportions of Dame Nature, and in almighty Fate, her only parent and guardian; for it hath been most graciously obliged (blessed be its name) to make us all very good.

I believe that the universe is a huge machine, wound up from everlasting by necessity, and consisting of an infinite number of links and chains, each in a progressive motion towards the zenith of perfection, and meridian of glory; that I myself am a little glorious piece of clock-work, a wheel within a wheel, or rather a pendulum in this grand machine, swinging hither and thither by the different impulses of fate and destiny; that my soul (if I have any) is an imperceptible bundle of exceeding minute corpuscles, much smaller than the finest Holland sand; and that certain persons in a very eminent station, are nothing else but a huge collection of necessary agents, who can do nothing at all.

I believe that there is no ill in the universe, nor any such thing as virtue absolutely considered; that those things vulgarly called sins, are only errors in the judgment, and foils to set off the beauty of Nature, or patches to adorn her face; that the whole race of intelligent beings, even the devils themselves (if there are any) shall finally be happy; so that Judas Iscariot is by this time a glorified saint, and it is good for him that he hath been born.

In fine, I believe in the divinity of L. S——, the saintship of Marcus Antoninus, the perspicuity and sublimity of A——e, and the perpetual duration of Mr. H——n's works, notwithstanding their present tendency to oblivion. Amen.

After Maxim VII has informed us that "A moderate man must endeavor as much as he handsomely can, to put off any appearance of devotion, and avoid all unnecessary exercise of religious worship, whether public or private," Maxim VIII gets at the heart of one phase of the problem in the Scottish Church by informing us that "In church settlements, which are the principal causes that come before ministers for judgment, the only thing to be regarded is, who the patrons and the great and noble heritors are for; the inclinations of the common people are to be utterly despised."

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“Thus,” concludes the author after thirteen maxims, of which those quoted are fair examples,

I have laid down and illustrated these excellent maxims, not without labour and expense of thought; and I think carried them so far as to make a complete system for the education and accomplishment of a moderate clergyman, for his guidance in public judgment, and his direction as to private practise. And now, courteous reader, as a traveller after having gone through the different parts of a country ascends some eminence to review the whole, let us stand still and rejoice over the happy state of our mother-church of Scotland, in which moderation so greatly prevails; and let us rejoice in hope of what improvements she may yet arrive at, by adhering to these maxims, now digested into such admirable form and order. O what noble, sublime, and impenetrable sermons shall now be preached! What victories and triumphs shall be obtained over the stupid populace by forced settlements, which never have such a beautiful and orderly form as when finished by soldiers, marching in comely array, with shining arms, a perfect image of the church-militant! And what perfectly virtuous and sinless lives shall be led by these clergy, who with steady eyes, regard the good of this vast whole, which never yet went wrong! There is nothing indeed that any way tarnishes the beauty of this prospect but the miscarriage of the augmentation scheme over which I could now lament in elegiac strains but that my hope is not yet quite extinct; for who can tell whether when we shall have driven away the whole common people to the Seceders who alone are fit for them, and captivated the hearts of the gentry to a love of our solitary temples, they may not be pleased to allow us more stipends, because we shall have nothing to do but to spend them?

Nothing could have succeeded better. The satire was the sensation of the hour. It took the Popular party by storm and went into edition after edition. The Moderates gnashed their teeth in wrath; they called the unknown author all manner of opprobrious names; threatenings and slaughter were breathed against him; the pamphlet was contrary to the interests of religion; no good man could have written such a thing; it was the work of an evil heart, a firebrand, a violent and contentious person, a man unfit to be a member of any peaceable society. Even a few of the Popular party were not quite sure that they should give it coun-

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tenance though it made them chuckle with glee in their low-roofed cottages. As one good soul expressed the doubt: "Alas! would it not have been better to have had recourse to prayer than satire?" The minister of Beith was the last man to doubt the efficacy of prayer, but he also had good scriptural authority for the belief that there is a time for everything, and from his point of view this was not exactly the time for prayer. So the sales went on. The second edition appeared in the middle of December, 1753, a second "corrected and enlarged" edition in 1754, a third with an additional maxim in May, 1754, an edition is mentioned in the *Gentleman's Magazine* as published in London in September, 1754, a fourth in February, 1755, the fifth in 1763 and the sixth in 1765, the seventh edition appeared in 1767, and finally in 1842 still another, making, exclusive of a Dutch translation, ten editions, of which the first five appeared in two years. Its authorship was never acknowledged in print by Dr. Witherspoon, even the *Apology* of 1767 being anonymous. To be sure, in 1765 when his London publisher issued his *Essays on Important Subjects* and included the satire and its defence, the title-page of the former states that they were inserted by the publishers and are only "generally ascribed to the same Author" as the essays; and in his preface to the volume Mr. Witherspoon says that "the liberty which the publishers seem resolved to take of adding to this collection two anonymous Treatises is what I could not prevent; and therefore if there be anything in them improper or offensive, they alone are to answer for it." It was left to American printers, the Bradfords of Philadelphia, in their edition of 1767 to place the author's name unequivocally on the title-page; but as late as 1774 Scottish conservatism, crystallized in William Gray, the Edinburgh publisher, was still listing *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* and its *Apology* among anonymous publications and separately from the other works of their then well-known author. The Bodleian Catalogue for some now inscrutable reason ascribed both to "the Reverend Mr. Buchanan of Somersetshire."

In Scotland the satire made too palpable a hit to remain long in anonymity. The fact that it was from Witherspoon's pen soon

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leaked out. "There is a piece published," wrote Mr. Samuel Davies in his diary in June, 1754, "under the title of 'Ecclesiastical Characteristics,' ascribed to one Mr. Witherspoon, a young minister. It is a burlesque upon the high flyers under the ironical name of moderate men; and I think the humour is nothing inferior to Dean Swift." In some quarters it was declared, however, that Witherspoon had merely aided in its composition, lacking the skill to be its sole author.

Hard hit though they were, the Moderates were too discreet to attempt any reply; but it gave a country schoolmaster and student of divinity in Edinburgh University, Andrew Moir by name, cause to think that he could benefit the reading public by an attempt at authorship. He called his production a *Letter to the Author of the Ecclesiastical Characteristics* and had it printed at Glasgow in the spring of 1754. It purports to be written by the president of a club of Moderate divinity students and describes their mode of life under the maxims of Witherspoon's satire. Allusions to the members are pointed by initials now unidentifiable.¹⁰ Mr. Moir had read Witherspoon's production with delight and in his own effort attempted to gild the lily. Dreary, if not pathetic, reading at best, it deserved little but contempt when it appeared; but the initials whetted public curiosity and caused somewhat of a stir, much to the satisfaction of its impulsive author who had made no secret of his authorship. For his pains he was expelled from the University and also from the Presbytery of Edinburgh. He promptly countered with another production *Moderation without Mercy*, and then informed a long-suffering world that he was the author of a recent ghastly performance called *The Deist stretched on a Death Bed, or a Lively Portraiture of a dying Infidel*. The wonder now is that the University and the Presbytery should have taken any notice whatever of the productions of this man, but the *Letter* was considered calumnious, his *Moderation without Mercy* scurrilous; and anything then ap-

¹⁰ In the copy owned by the Edinburgh Public Library these initials had been filled out in the margins by some former owner, but a cheerfully careless binder trimmed those margins so that the identifications are mutilated beyond deciphering. The copy in the Library of Princeton University belonged to Witherspoon himself and is unmarked.

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pearing on the controversy between the two parties in the Church secured immediate attention.¹¹

The *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* was not Mr. Witherspoon's first anonymous appearance in print. The *Scots Magazine* for April, 1753, contains an essay by him on Lord Kaims which, while not of surpassing merit, is nevertheless interesting as his earliest published defence of the philosophy of common sense and was claimed by him in later years to have antedated the work of Reid. John Erskine of Edinburgh had lent Witherspoon a copy of a book by Dr. Joseph Bellamy of New England "with which he was much pleased," and to keep Mr. Bellamy informed on the development of this "valuable young minister," Mr. Erskine forwarded to his American correspondent the anonymous essay of his younger friend.¹² This was the latter's introduction to American readers.

Mr. Witherspoon was sent to the Assembly of 1756 and appointed on two important committees, one of them being the annual commission. At this Assembly he undoubtedly heard read a letter from the trustees of the College of New Jersey in America returning thanks for the collection granted to that institution. Whether he had met Messrs. Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Davies when they visited Great Britain on behalf of the college a year or two earlier is not known although, as we have seen, Mr. Davies knew him by reputation; but he little dreamed that in a dozen years or so his own name would be permanently associated with the college which they represented.

In the spring of 1756 the Laigh Kirk or Low Church, at Paisley, a few miles north of Beith, found itself without a minister.

¹¹ The facts in the case are to be found in the first edition of the *Edinburgh Review* for January, 1755, p. 56, (or in the 1818 reprint, p. 49) in an article whose authorship is ascribed, in a pencil note in the British Museum copy of the reprint, to Dr. Jardine of Edinburgh. The *Scots Magazine* for April, 1754, contains the report of Moir's trial before the University and his formal expulsion and repudiation. The report signed by the rector was ordered printed. Mr. Moir's escapade does not seem to have definitely ruined his career. In Dr. Witherspoon's library is a sermon by Mr. Moir printed at Edinburgh in 1761 on *The Babbling, or the Fate of the faithful Minister of Christ*, whose title page shows that he was pastor of a parish, and whose contents are colored with his personal experiences as an enemy of moderation. Mr. Moir had a gift for curious titles.

¹² *New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings*, vol. VI, p. 170.

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Witherspoon's fame was rising; the second edition of his *Essay on Justification*¹³ had appeared at Edinburgh, and he seemed best fitted to fill the vacancy. Accordingly in June the magistrates and town council, patrons of the living, resolved to call him and having found that the citizens of the borough as well as the church session concurred in their choice, they ordered their clerk to make out the necessary documents. The presentation duly signed was transmitted to Beith for Witherspoon's acceptance, and the patrons, "willing to give all suitable encouragement," bound themselves and their successors to pay him the yearly salary of twenty-four pounds eight shillings and tenpence and two-thirds sterling more than the thousand marks scots and twenty pounds sterling for manse and glebe already provided for their minister. Owing to an error in the presentation a fresh copy had to be prepared, and on Witherspoon's acceptance a committee was ordered to take the documents to presbytery and apply for the moderation of a call. Again there was delay; for in August the Paisley Council learned that the presbytery, without assigning reasons, had refused to grant the call. It developed that the presbytery had taken umbrage at the *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* of which the candidate was the alleged author, and which according to the presbytery was harmful to the interests of religion,

¹³ The first edition was issued at Glasgow earlier in the same year. The work was based on two sermons "now thrown into the form of an essay, lest the despised title of a sermon should offend some." The essay also admits of the addition of notes, some of which "regard the philosophical principles which have of late been published among us, of which I propose in a short time a fuller discussion." Mr. Witherspoon never fulfilled this intention. The introduction refers to the disinclination of the present age to listen to the Gospel; but on the contrary to "despise and deride the message because of the meanness of the messenger, or the homeliness of the terms in which it is delivered. . . . From a certain love of ease and luxury of mind, they despise and trample upon all distinctions, which have not something pleasing and insinuating in their ideas and form." The most special or plausible objection to the doctrine of Justification by imputed righteousness is that it "loosens the obligation and practice," and that is what he has particularly applied himself to refute in the following essay. It is addressed to the Reverend Mr. Hervey, rector of Weston Favell in Northamptonshire, England, in testimony of Mr. Witherspoon's esteem for his excellent writings, as a public declaration of his espousal of the same sentiments as Mr. Hervey, his ambition to contribute to the support of the same cause, and also that thereby "It might appear to all that no external distinction, or smaller differences, ought to be any hindrance to a cordial esteem and affection between the sincere servants of our common Master."

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and injurious to the characters of many ministers of the church. The council appealed to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr and before its bar Witherspoon appeared and right willingly defended himself in a speech which he later amplified into his *Apology*. He made the strong opening point that, without a hearing in his own behalf or even a chance to see his accusations, he had been condemned as the author of a pamphlet with which the presbytery did not find itself in sympathy; and the town of Paisley was now awaiting redress. He did not pretend, nor had he ever pretended, to any connection with the pamphlet in question and he would not yield his present point by discussing that production. But he would consider a little whether the crime of which he was accused was so safely to be taken for granted as to allow presbytery to assert it in their minutes and associate his name with it, without allowing him opportunity to be heard. Did not the people of Paisley know the rumor of his authorship when they sent him their unanimous call? Were they so abandoned that they would call an enemy to watch for their souls? Did not the presbytery know that he the suspect had been member of an adjoining presbytery ever since the suspicion began to exist? that he had been a member of the Synod with themselves? that he had been a member indeed of the General Assembly? Did not the presbytery know that a large majority of people found no fault with the pamphlet and that prominent divines like the bishops of London and Oxford and Gloucester had given it their approval? By the hastiness and partiality of presbytery's sentence it looked to him as if the members felt themselves struck at in the pamphlet and if they did so feel, was it just that they should constitute themselves his judges? He does not pretend to the "polite and courtly" style, but believing that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God he would examine the whole situation calmly and simply. And into every phase of it he proceeds to go, in a long and able argument full of clear close reasoning and subtle thrusts at the Moderates, proving pretty conclusively that the Paisley presbytery, which had no jurisdiction over him, had been guilty of irregular procedure and flagrant injustice in passing sentence on his character, in finding relevancy without examination, and in appointing a committee or, as he terms it, an in-

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quisition, to discover the facts directly in the face of law and equity.

The speech is a brilliant piece of adroit pleading and a perfect example of the argumentative and tactical skill that made its author so redoubtable a debater on the floor of the Assembly. And the delicious humor of the situation lay in the fact that all the parties concerned were quite aware that the speaker was the author of the satire in question. It was evident that the Moderates had made a blunder. Long and heated discussion of the "Paisley affair," as it was called, ensued and the Synod directed a committee to see if the parties could not settle the matter out of court. At length it was agreed that the Synod should order the presbytery to moderate a call without discussing the latter's right to enquire into the *fama clamosa* relative to *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, and without approving or disapproving the presbytery's action in the case. The members of the presbytery, by no means of one mind on the subject and glad enough now to settle the matter as speedily as possible since Dr. Witherspoon had won all the laurels, agreed to the arrangement if the Synod would vindicate them from the injurious reflections thrown out against them "as if their conduct had been inquisitorial and hurtful to the Liberties of Mankind." Hurt feelings being thus healed, the Synod appointed December 9, 1756, as the date of the moderation and the Reverend Archibald Smith as preacher, on which occasion the Paisley records assure us a most harmonious call was issued. It bore the names of the magistrates, town council, and the kirk session, the concurrences signed by the incorporators within the borough and by other proprietors of the sittings, the heritors, heads of families, and a number of burgesses and citizens. There could be no doubt of the cordial welcome Dr. Witherspoon was receiving from his new charge. But the end was not yet. It now remained to get the documents in the case formally laid before the Presbytery of Irvine to which Beith belonged and to secure his release, an apparently simple matter which required six months more to negotiate. And long before it reached a consummation, in fact a week after the events just related, social, literary, and clerical Edinburgh was thrown into intense excitement over a play performed for the first time in

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public on December 14, 1756, at the Canongate Theatre, the same house that Allan Ramsay had been compelled to close, thanks to the puritanical tone of the Edinburgh public. The play was *Douglas* and its author the Reverend John Home, Witherspoon's former college-mate and his fellow prisoner at Castle Doune, now a minister in the Church, and up to this time in good standing.

It is not difficult to understand the stir if we can appreciate the curiosity aroused as to what sort of play a Scotsman, a minister of the Established Church, would write. Garrick at London had declined the manuscript but that did not dampen the hopes of literary Edinburgh, and it is said that when the play was finally produced the town was actually in an "uproar of exultation" that it should have proved to be of the first order. A racy account of the whole episode is given by Dr. Carlyle, who with several ministerial friends attended the performance, much to the hurt of stricter brethren. The clerical authorship of *Douglas* gave it greater interest than its patriotic subject. Antagonists and champions rushed into print and for the next few months the bookshops were flooded with bitter sermons on one side, abusive essays on the other, and alleged verse satirizing both. The stage was attacked in doggerel and defended with the same weapon; personal abuse was conspicuous; and, as might be expected, the two parties in the Church lined up on opposite sides of the question.

The best type of the antitheatre essay is John Witherspoon's *Serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage*, published originally at Glasgow. It summed up as soberly, and really as fairly as the times permitted, the orthodox position on the question "Whether supporting and encouraging stage-plays, by writing, acting, or attending them, is consistent, or inconsistent, with the character of a Christian."

The primary object of the drama, says the essayist, is pleasure and amusement, whereas man's one and only obligation is "supremely and uniformly to aim at the glory of God." If a sense of this obligation were in men's minds "stage-plays, nay, and a thousand other amusements now in use would never have been heard of. The truth is, the need of amusement is much less than

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people commonly apprehend, and where it is not necessary, it must be sinful." Even as an amusement or recreation the stage is unnecessary and expensive. It is an unlawful recreation because it agitates the passions too violently and interests too deeply, and therefore is not recreative in effect. The Christian character implies "self-denial and heavenliness of mind," neither of which is induced by the drama. For these reasons, the theatre may not be supported by professing Christians.

The author next considers "the modern pretence" that the stage is useful and instructive. He finds that it is unauthorized by Scripture and that it does not tend to support the interests of religion. There are "noble and excellent" sentiments in some dramas but "much fewer than is commonly supposed," and there is a great difference between these sentiments and "the solid and profitable truths of religion." In fact, the majority of plays have a pernicious tendency. "They commonly turn upon the characters most grateful, and the events most interesting, to corrupt nature. Pride under the name of greatness of mind, ambition and revenge under those of valour and heroism, have been their constant subjects; but chiefly love; love, which is the strongest passion and the most dangerous in the human frame, and from which the greatest number of crimes, and crimes the most atrocious, have sprung, was always encouraged upon the stage."

Further, the drama "in its most inspired state is a picture of human life and must represent characters as they really are." If a dramatist did not depict real life he would transgress the fundamental rules of the art. The majority of characters represented on the stage are bad, and the impression made on the audience is hurtful.

No one can contribute to the encouragement of the stage, without "being partaker of the sins of other" in that he helps to support "the players in that most unchristian occupation" and encourages by example "those to attend all plays indiscriminately, who are in most danger of infection."

Nor is the drama necessary to education. "Without it young persons of rank think they cannot have that knowledge of the world which is necessary to their accomplishment." But why should the world "or anything else be known, but in order to our

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spiritual improvement?" Where can plays be found—at least comedies—"that are free from impurities, either directly or by allusion and double meaning?" And even when plays are "more reserved" themselves, they are sure to be "seasoned with something of this kind in the prologue or epilogue, the music between acts, or in some scandalous farce with which the diversion is concluded." The author pretends to no firsthand knowledge of these things "but from printed accounts and the public bills of what plays are to be acted." He affirms that no woman of "reputation (as it is called in the world), much less of piety who has been ten times in a playhouse, durst repeat in company all that she has heard there." And the essay ends with an inevitable parting shot at the reverend author of *Douglas*.

The *Scots Magazine*¹⁴ in its review of Witherspoon's essay, the only one written during the controversy that is noticed at length, was glad that he had put his name on the titlepage and wished other writers would follow his example; it would be a pledge for decency, said the reviewer, a quality sadly lacking in the "immense quantity of profane drollery and personal abuse" which had been published for and against the stage during the past few months and which, by the way, Mr. Witherspoon deemed strong evidence of the immorality of the theatre. It is only fair to say that a pamphlet entitled *Morality of Stage-Plays Seriously Considered*, written by Adam Ferguson, defended just as calmly the liberal position, laying down the proposition among others that it was the duty of Christians to support the theatre and thus raise its moral tone. This was promptly answered by a still longer effusion *Some Remarks on a late Pamphlet entitled The Morality of Stage Plays Seriously Considered*. Equally anonymous, and making up in scurrility what they lacked in dignity, were satires in verse like *Douglasiana*, consisting of five songs arranged to popular airs and ridiculing the ministers defending the play, and *The Seven Champions of the Stage*, subtitled "an excellent new old-fashioned song," which was indeed new and may have been old-fashioned, but which only blindest partisanship could have called excellent. Both are in the Witherspoon Collection at Princeton.

¹⁴ vol. XIX, p. 143.

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“Home and his friends”, says Professor Mathieson,¹⁵ “by extorting such an avowal (as Witherspoon’s essay), from their opponents had raised a far larger question than one of clerical decorum; and the Church, which had dallied with humanism whilst professing to maintain its Puritan tradition, had come at last to the parting of ways.” And Professor Mathieson thinks that Dr. Alexander Carlyle did not greatly exaggerate the significance of the crisis when he said he could not help numbering the production of *Douglas* and the circumstances attending it among the most remarkable occurrences that had ever taken place in Scotland. The Church at large, or at least so much of it as was immediately concerned, lost no time in setting forth its opinion of the advanced wing which supported Home and his play. The Presbytery of Edinburgh issued an *Admonition and Exhortation* to all within its bounds which was speedily ridiculed in parody and song. A light sentence was inflicted on one member of the presbytery, who being summoned before it for having been present at the opening night, pleaded guilty and offered the extenuation that he had stood in a corner out of general view. Others were rebuked by their own presbyteries. John Home, to save his head, delivered a tearful farewell sermon and resigned his charge. Even Dr. Carlyle found himself in hot water, being accused of keeping company with players, attending rehearsals, directing the actors, and appearing at the playhouse and turning some gentlemen out of a box in a disorderly manner. The fact that these gentlemen were usurpers of the box, and hilariously drunk at that, did not mitigate the main offence, and on appeal the case went through the Synod up to the General Assembly which confirmed the lower court’s condemnatory sentence. Two years later, however, Dr. Carlyle was elected to preach before the Lord High Commissioner; in 1770 he became Moderator of the Assembly, and in 1789 just failed of election to its chief clerkship, one of the responsible permanent offices within its gift; so that the victory of the orthodox party in his case would seem to have been slight indeed.

At this Assembly (May, 1757,) Dr. Witherspoon fought one of his losing battles against the Moderates, leading a band of eight

¹⁵ *Awakening of Scotland*, p. 199.

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dissenters from the vote of the majority to accept the commission of elders who had not qualified according to the technical church law. The Patronage Act required elders to be strict in the observance of the Sabbath and in family worship. The elders in question confessedly failed of these qualifications and Wither- spoon used the logic of the situation against the Moderates who claimed to stand for the strict adherence to law. Regarding personal religion as of indispensable importance to eldership under the law, he demanded that the commissions from six or seven presbyteries be thrown out. But for the moment the Moderates seemed to think that the one thing needful for a pastor was that he should be presented and for an elder that he should have political backing. It is suspected that the practice of running in lawyers and other shrewd laymen as elders to fill the Moderate ranks and sit in the Assembly to argue for their side and to introduce courtroom methods, is traceable to this period. Wither- spoon's dissent pointed out the evil consequences of such a practice, consequences which have not altogether failed of realization. There seems to be no question that the *Reasons for Dissent* on this occasion were drawn up by him; they bear strong marks of his style and they were read by him before the Assembly. The preamble admits that there are decisions from which it would be unnecessary, if not improper, for a minority to dissent. But the present decision is fraught with so much danger that the dissenters feel it requires as strong and public disapproval as possible. They declare, therefore, that the acceptance of faulty commissions is a manifest violation of the standing law of the Church's constitution; it opens the way to further and greater breaches of that constitution; as a decision from the highest tribunal of the Church it is especially dangerous, and in view of the fact that the method of selecting elders for the Assembly is carefully protected by the constitution, a breach thereof in admitting unworthy men when the decay of personal religion is so great and so visible, is deplorable. But the protest was ordered to lie on the table, and there it still remains.¹⁶

In the meantime the cumbrous formalities connected with the

¹⁶ The text of the *Dissent* may be found in Morren's *Annals*, vol. II, p. 103-108. It was also separately printed.

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call to Paisley had been complied with, and in June, 1757, the Reverend Mr. Baine, minister of the beautiful and historic abbey at Paisley, was able to report to the town council that the papers had been served on the Presbytery of Irvine, and on the sixteenth, no objections having been registered, the new pastor was inducted into office at the Laigh Kirk. Mr. Baine preached the installation sermon, which from its misdated imprint, its misspelling of the new minister's name, and the odd "advertisement" serving as a preface, is altogether a curiosity.

"It will perhaps occur," says this preface, "that something else than its merit brings this little performance to light; and now that it appears in public the question is not if it be weak but is it strong? is it truth in season or ill timed invective? The studied and not unacceptable brevity of the sermon made some further illustration of it necessary and if any of the subjoined notes have assumed a spirit and colour different from the original discourse; if in any of them bold superlative folly is exhibited in its proper dress, the gentle reader, 'tis hop'd, will not take offence."¹⁷

To a man of less buoyant spirit than Witherspoon the sermon would have seemed more chilling than the proverbial wet blanket. The text was that exquisite fifteenth verse of the tenth chapter of Romans, and the preacher appeared to wish to remind at least one of his hearers that it was a gospel of peace and not of discord and wrangle of which they both were the messengers. But the only beauty in the sermon lies in its text. A careless piece of composition throughout, it ends abruptly though not before it advertises its orthodoxy by getting in a hard hit at the stage and of course at the author of *Douglas*.

The Laigh Kirk at Paisley had been opened for worship in 1738 when the population of the town was about 3500. It contained over 1300 sittings of which nearly three-fourths were retained by those who had subscribed the £1934 the building had cost. When Witherspoon was called to the church, Paisley had a population of 12,000 and was still growing. In 1733 its streets

¹⁷A Sermon preached at the Translation of the Rev. Mr. Witherspoon, from Beith to the Laigh Church at Paisley, June 16, 1757. By James Baine, M.A. Minister of the Gospel in Paisley. Glasgow: Printed by Archibald M'Lean, MDCCVII, pp. 18. 8vo.

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had been narrow and dirty, its houses mean in appearance, and its people slovenly in dress and manners. Fifty years later its streets were "spacious and well paved," its houses mostly "new and elegant," its people "gay and polite," and its servant girls in their "caps, gauzes and white stockings were better dressed than citizens' wives" of the earlier generation. The change was due almost entirely to the success of the weaving trade which had been taken up late after the Reformation and which was now drawing to the place crowds of strangers from all quarters bent on business. The town was in a transition stage when Mr. Witherspoon settled there and he entered fully into the needs and hopes of the community. He was able ultimately to boast in the General Assembly with Mr. Baine that the oversight of morals in Paisley was unsurpassed in any town of its size in Scotland. He speedily won the regard and respect of the municipal authorities and he must have made his position sure when he lent the council a hundred pounds within nine months after his arrival. The great majority of Scottish livings at the time were worth under £70 so that Witherspoon's salary of more than a hundred pounds at the Laigh Kirk, the same as Mr. Baine's at the Abbey, was considerably above the average.

Change of pastorate did not mean, however, any relaxation in attitude toward the Moderates. On the contrary the new minister's first year at Paisley saw him delivering on special occasions sermons that showed clearly his intention to maintain the stand he had taken as the avowed champion of orthodoxy, in opposition to the increasing liberalism of the other party. These sermons are the group he later published at London in the first collection of his writings as most truly expressive of himself and of the message he felt he bore for the times. The first of them was preached in January, 1758, at Edinburgh before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge.¹⁸ In printing the sermon, which opens with a phrase aimed directly at the Moderates as men "who disguise or alter the gospel in order to defend it," or who "often endeavour to give such views of Christianity as will render it palatable to a corrupt worldly mind, and instead

¹⁸ *The Absolute Necessity of Salvation through Christ.*

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of abusing will soothe and gratify the pride of man," Dr. Witherspoon added a long note on charity. He was aware that the sternness of the doctrine he preached would make him likely to be called uncharitable; but he held that no charity should be shown to errors in teaching fundamental doctrines. The Scriptures had no such meaning in their use of the word. And as he had anticipated, this view of charity at once met serious objections, and when he prepared a second edition of the sermon, as he was soon compelled to do, he sent with it an essay on the *Scripture Meaning of Charity*.

In February, 1758, on the day appointed for the annual public fast he took as his subject the inseparability of religion and national prosperity and painted a dark picture of the times.¹⁹

Every class and denomination of men among us, every party and faction, however unwilling each may be to acknowledge its own share of the guilt, and however prone to load its adversaries with the blame of procuring it, is yet willing to acknowledge that we are at present in a distressed, and in an contemptible state. . . . We have not only had for sometime past repeated threatenings of scarcity and dearth, but vast multitudes have been afflicted with famine in its rigor. . . . We have been long engaged in war with a powerful and politic enemy. And has not the providence of God sensibly frowned on us, and visibly frustrated almost every one of our attempts—we have turned our backs faint-hearted before our enemies in almost every encounter; and the greater and more formidable our preparation for any enterprise, the more pitiful the issue, and the more shameful our defeat and disappointment. . . . Is not this nation, once in a manner the arbiter of the fate of Europe now become the scorn and derision of her neighbours and all that are round about her? . . . How numerous and expensive, but how useless and inactive have been our fleets and armies! And how deplorable is the condition of our colonies abroad! They are the chief theatre of war, because indeed, they are the subject of the contest. Surely it is affecting to think of the unnatural barbarity and cruelty that there is often exercised when no age or sex is spared. . . .

If it please God to suffer our enemies and continue their progress, it is hard to say how far the desolation may extend, or how universal it may prove.

As for the religious side of national life, as a people and as a

¹⁹ *Prayer for National Prosperity*.

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Church they had fallen low; infidelity was gross and prevalent, many persons of high rank were deserting the house and the worship of God, and openly treating His service and His servants with contempt.

So great, said the preacher, is the prevalence of irreligion, contempt of God, sensuality and pride, that many of the grossest crimes are not only practised but professed, not only frequent but open, not only persisted in, but gloried in and boasted of; insomuch that it requires no small degree of fortitude and resolution, steadfastly to adhere to the principles and character of a disciple of Christ, in opposition to the spirit and stream of fashionable conversation. In place of the purity of faith and strictness of morals which was the glory of the Reformation, we have substituted a pliant and fashionable scheme of religion, a fine theory of virtue and morality, a beautiful but unsubstantial idol, raised by human pride, adorned and dressed by human art and supported by the wisdom of words.

He exhorts his hearers to mend their ways; he begs them to pray for "our gracious sovereign King George, under whose mild and legal government, we have long enjoyed as much happiness as our national quiet would allow," that the Lord may give him wise understanding, protect his person, direct his councils, and prosper his arms. A review of history shows that God has supported his people and his cause when things were at the lowest ebb.

Let no Christian, therefore, give way to desponding thoughts, though infidelity unresisted spread its poison . . . though there are few to support the interest of truth and righteousness, though we have seen a new thing on the earth, a minister of Christ leaving the pulpit for the stage, let us not be discouraged. We plead the cause that shall finally prevail.

Another important and characteristic discourse was delivered in the Abbey at Paisley on September 7, 1758, at the ordination of Mr. Archibald Davidson as one of the ministers of that church.²⁰ Its purpose was to find out why upright and faithful ministers meet with calumny, and are called seditious and factious breeders of trouble, enemies to Caesar and turners of the world upside down. What is there, asks the preacher, in true re-

²⁰ *Charge of Sedition and Faction against good Men.*

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ligion that gives rise to this accusation and makes society so prone to believe it? It is because the servants of God are and must be the objects of the resentment of those who will not follow in their steps; they will not and dare not comply with the sinful commandments of man; and they are often obliged to bear witness against the sins of others and reprove them.

There seems to be an under current of personal feeling in certain passages of this sermon as if the speaker were drawing on his own experience: "Are there not some," he asks, "who cannot endure such strictness as is inconsistent with conformity to the gay and fashionable world? . . . Do they not consider every re-prover as an enemy to their State? Do they not hear with secret pleasure and spread with apparent triumph, every report to the prejudice of such troublers of Israel?" Cautious persons must beware of being misled by the persecuting cry. Ministers in particular must be careful not to give any real ground for it; they should conduct their zeal with steadiness, but also with meekness; avoid intermeddling with civil affairs; finally should bear the charge with patience.

In the charge to the new minister Dr. Witherspoon reiterates the necessity of preaching the "grand and leading truths of the gospel, original sin, Christ's imputed righteousness, justification by free grace, the necessity of regeneration, and the operation of the Spirit." Any minister in the Scottish Church who, having subscribed to the Confession of Faith, did not preach these truths was guilty of perjury. This was a straight thrust at his opponents besides being a summary of his own theological views; and when he goes on to say that he would have sermons carefully prepared but not "dressed up with excessive elegance, and a vain ornamental foppery of style," one is inclined to ask whether he was thinking of his college-mate, Hugh Blair, then in the full glory of his oratorical powers. Such sermons, he said, reminded him of painted windows which with their fine colors made a brave show but kept out the light and rendered the house comfortless and dark. He had evidently noticed the beautiful ancient glass which is still the glory of Paisley's Abbey. It indeed made a brave show, and perhaps kept out some light, but to a

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more liberal mind it would scarcely have seemed to "render the house comfortless." On the contrary, to such a man the happier thought would have occurred that those glowing windows were relics, in this Romanist abbey turned Presbyterian kirk, of a lost art, an art in its day lovingly practised and piously dedicated to the glory of God and of His Church Invisible.

The most interesting passage in the sermon, however, in view of the preacher's subsequent career, is his declaration that ministers should avoid meddling with civil affairs—they should be separate and set apart for their work, consecrated to their office; it is sinful and dangerous for them "to desire or claim the direction of such matters as fall within the province of the civil magistrates." These words were spoken in September 1758. Twenty years later the preacher was completing the second of five separate years of service as a member of the American Continental Congress. More than that, when he found after the American Revolution that the constitution of the State of Georgia contained a provision that no clergyman of any denomination should be a member of the Legislature, he wrote a letter to the public press asking for the reasons of this disqualification, depriving the clergy as it did of one of their "most important rights" as citizens.²¹ By that time both he and his enemies in Scotland had forgotten the sermon in Paisley Abbey.

As moderator of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, in October, 1759, he opened the session with a sermon on the "Trial of Religious Truth by Its Moral Influence," the last of his great doctrinal sermons, and here again he insists on all the old orthodox points, and gives a gloomy description of the religious decadence of the country, closing with a frank statement of the weakness and intellectual dishonesty only too prevalent in the ministry, whereby "an unsubstantial theory of virtue" was being preached in place of "the great and operative views of the gospel."

He had lost no time in joining hands with Mr. Baine and doing what he could to lessen the burden of his older colleague. It was thought that the organization of two church sessions instead of the existing one would be a step in that direction, and

²¹ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 227, (edition of 1800).

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in April, 1758, the two ministers applied to the presbytery of Paisley to erect them. When the presbytery refused the request they appealed to the synod and there the presbytery's decision was reversed. But the presbytery promptly appealed to the General Assembly and another petty fight was on. It mattered not that the magistrates and council of Paisley agreed with the ministers that the two sessions would tend to greater comfort and efficiency in the two churches; the presbytery had not forgotten the lashing the younger minister had given it not so very long ago when his call to Paisley was under discussion. The town officials desired only peace and sent a propitiatory committee to the presbytery signifying their concurrence in the ministers' proposition and praying for the presbytery to withdraw the appeal to the Assembly and to grant the application. But the presbytery refused to hear the petition, and the town then directed Mr. Baine and Mr. Witherspoon, the latter as moderator of the session, to appear at the bar of the Assembly and prosecute a counter appeal against the presbytery. The two ministers published their case in a quarto pamphlet²² wherein they went into full, and (to modern readers) tedious, detail. But the opposition was too strong and at the Assembly the synod's authorization for the erection of a second session at Paisley was reversed, and the erection of any new session for the Laigh Kirk was forbidden until that part of the town should be legally disjoined and formed into a parish.

Paisley had enjoyed Mr. Witherspoon's pastorate for two years when there came a call for his services elsewhere. In July, 1759, one of the ministers of the Scottish church at Rotterdam was made emeritus, and application was made to Dr. John Erskine and Mr. Robert Walker of Edinburgh for names of candidates to fill the vacancy. Their first choice declining to leave Scotland, they named the junior minister at Paisley as possessing all the requisite qualities, besides being one of the most esteemed men in the church. He was approached and took the proposal under consideration. Without waiting for his decision, the

²² See Appendix I.

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Rotterdam church elected him unanimously; but his ties were already too strong and he declined to break them.²³

At the meeting of the Assembly of 1760 he delivered another powerful speech on the old subject of compelling a parish to accept a minister against its will. The Earl of Balcarras, patron of the living at Kilconquhar, had presented it to Dr. John Chalmers of Elie, and the people objected to him. The Assembly voted that Dr. Chalmers should be installed in the face of the parochial protest. From this decision Witherspoon and five others dissented, and it was in defence of this action that he delivered the speech referred to.²⁴ It is a dispassionate statement of the case from the Popular party's point of view. He had long had the deepest sense of the dishonor and loss of authority that the Church was suffering and the injury that the souls of men had suffered by many settlements in which a pastor was installed without a people. He was aware that many worthy and faithful ministers looked upon these cases as of necessity under the law of patronage, but he feared that from the habit of doing so when there was necessity the Assembly was continuing to do so when there was no necessity. Could a pastor, he asked, be of service to a flock that did not want him and would not listen to him? There was strong opposition to Dr. Chalmers on good grounds; his settlement at Kilconquhar was not a necessity, and the speaker called on everyone within hearing to judge seriously whether this settlement would be for the glory of God and the good of mankind. It would offend not only the people of the parish and those in the lower class of society but many also in all stations of life; and it was these people who were led to treat with derision a minister's concern for his usefulness and to declare that it was for nothing more than the desire of a comfortable benefice and a

²³ W. Steven, *History of the Scottish Church at Rotterdam*, Edinburgh, 1832, p. 192. Although Mr. Witherspoon did not visit Holland until 1768 when he was preparing to leave Europe for America, he seems to have been much interested in the Dutch Church, and we shall see that he made an effort to secure the emigration of a Dutch professor of theology for the Colonies. Several of his works were translated into Dutch and were published in Holland, his *Essay on Regeneration* being issued under the editorship of Paul Chevalier, Professor of Theology at the University of Gröningen.

²⁴ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 327.

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salary for life. As for himself he would be sorry to see the day come in Scotland when they would learn from England how to leave the people and the work entirely out of consideration, and so call their charges no longer "parishes" but frankly "livings."

The editor of the *Annals of the General Assembly* notes that in transportation cases it had been the Assembly's custom to engage in prayer, but the manuscript record says nothing of such procedure on this occasion.

At the meeting of the General Assembly of 1761 Witherspoon was at last to taste the fruits of victory in the cause that was enlisting his most persistent energy, the cause of the people against ecclesiastical high-handedness. During the preceding autumn the magistrates, council and kirk session of Paisley had perfected, after much deliberation, a scheme whereby the office of English schoolmaster and session clerk should be combined, a plan which incidentally sheds some light on prevalent educational conditions. In September they had elected to the clerkship the incumbent of the mastership, one William Adie who, however, was opposed to the union of duties. Although entirely approved of by the presbytery the scheme had to receive the sanction of the Synod and in October for reasons of its own that body vetoed the plan and forbade the union. Paisley decided to carry the matter higher and accordingly at the Assembly in 1761 Witherspoon led the fight against the Synod. He made it clear that by the decree of erection of the parish the magistrates and council of the town were well within their rights in the proposal and he argued the opposition to a standstill so that the Assembly was forced to reach the wary verdict that it "could not disapprove" the conduct of the Paisley Kirk session in sanctioning the plan, and it furthermore could see nothing in it injurious to the session, and that therefore it reversed the sentence of the Synod, sustained the election of Adie as session clerk, and ordered the session to admit him accordingly. And Mr. Witherspoon went back to Paisley for once a victor. It was a novel sensation.

The popularity Mr. Witherspoon enjoyed at Paisley was strikingly illustrated in the following spring when the town of Dundee moderated a call to him and applied to the presbytery of Paisley to have him transported. At the hearing set, the patrons of the

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Laigh Kirk produced a strong resolution against his departure concluding in these terms:

And as the Magistrates and Council are much satisfied with the said Mr. Witherspoon and are greatly against his transportation, and likewise judging such a transportation would be much to the hurt of the Community and Lay them under very great Hardship and Inconveniencys, Therefore they hereby resolve to oppose the said Transportation to the utmost of their Power.

For this purpose they appointed a committee to appear at the Presbytery not only to oppose but to prevent the transportation. With the municipal resolution went one of even greater significance from the "Society of Weavers, Taylors, Shoe Makers and Wrights in Paisley" also protesting against the transportation. The whole town stood behind its representatives in opposing the move, forming a unanimous and remarkable tribute to the man. The documents²⁶ filed in the case were numerous and wordy and the matter was too difficult for the presbytery to settle, especially as it appeared to the members that the reasons favoring transportation preponderated, while Witherspoon himself was unwilling to go. To the Assembly naturally, therefore, the case was referred and in May, 1762, from Dundee appeared two representatives of the magistrates and council with three ministers of the presbytery, and a lawyer, while from Paisley appeared two members of its council, with a lawyer, and Witherspoon himself. Both sides were heard, Witherspoon being also interrogated, and after debate the Assembly to the joy of Paisley decided that its pastor should stay where he was. The story of the Dundee call and especially a consideration of the documents filed by Witherspoon's constituency at Paisley form the best possible refutation of the allegation so persistently made that he left Scotland dissatisfied and disappointed.

Zeal for the interests of good morals was responsible, however, for his entanglement at this time in an unfortunate affair known as the Snodgrass case, which, while it did him no great harm at Paisley or among his friends elsewhere, nevertheless because of certain personal elements injected into it and because there can

²⁶ Paisley MS. town records.

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be little doubt that for once Mr. Witherspoon allowed himself to be carried away by his zeal, did not place him in the best light before the world at large. At the meeting of the Assembly which considered his call to Dundee there was lying on the table a protest from the Presbytery of Paisley and John Snodgrass, a Paisley sheriff's clerk, and others, against Witherspoon and the kirk session. It seems that two months earlier, on the evening before the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Snodgrass and five other young men of the town met in a private room on a frequented street and held a drinking bout, in the course of which they not only became noisy and profane, thereby causing a crowd to collect, but, so it was alleged, mimicked their ministers and went so far as to hold a mock celebration of the morrow's sacrament. The story reaching Witherspoon's ears he reported it to the session who called the accused and began an examination. While this was in progress Mr. Witherspoon preached a sermon in which he represented the defendants as men of vicious habits and character, especially naming young Snodgrass who he alleged had contracted his habits in student days at Edinburgh. The session having concluded its investigation found the accused guilty, and sentenced them to public rebuke before the congregation and to whatever further censure the presbytery might inflict. At the presbytery Witherspoon, evidently still under strong emotion, threatened to print his sermon with names and evidence, unless the presbytery's censure were what he deemed adequate to the enormity of the offense. But after examining the documents the presbytery decided that the sacrilegious celebration was not proven, and, therefore, merely ordered the moderator to rebuke the culprits before the bar of presbytery. Witherspoon at once protested against the decision and declared that he would appeal to the Assembly, and in May, 1762, he printed his sermon and placed it on sale at three bookshops in Edinburgh, two at Glasgow, two at Dumfries, and one each at Stirling, Perth, Dundee, Kilmarnock, Greenock, and Ayr. It was dedicated to the Town Council at Paisley, and its preface states that although "considerable alteration and additions were made in transcribing the sermon for the press" yet it is substantially the same, and "the passages complained of are

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printed precisely in the terms in which they were delivered.”²⁶

At this juncture, it is said, cooler heads advised Dr. Witherspoon that his action was not only injudicious but unjustifiable, and he went, therefore, to some pains to gather together all copies he could find and actually stopped the sales until the meeting of the Assembly was over. He subsequently denied this, explaining that the non-distribution of the sermon was due to the fact that he had suspended the sales until after a decision had been reached by the Assembly on his Dundee call lest it should exercise undue influence in the decision of the greater question of his transportation. That matter settled, the sermon was put on sale immediately after the Assembly adjourned. As a result the complainants found themselves odious in Paisley and their lives and persons even endangered on the streets. They, therefore, sued the minister in the civil courts for criminal libel and asked damages to the amount of one hundred pounds each and one hundred pounds costs. The case came up in June, 1764, and five months later the opinion was handed down that, though the preaching of the sermon was justifiable, the printing and publishing of it, with an explanatory preface wherein the plaintiffs were charged by name with the actions described in the sermon, was illegal, unwarrantable and injurious, and that, therefore, the defendant was liable for damages and costs; but inasmuch as the preaching was occasioned by improper conduct on the part of the plaintiffs—two of the young men concerned had hastily left Paisley, and another had apologised before the session for his conduct—and the publication of the sermon was due to intemperate zeal rather than to malicious and deliberate intent to injure, the damages were set at only thirty pounds and the costs at eighty-eight pounds, ten shillings. On appeal, the higher courts increased the damages to one hundred and fifty pounds and granted full costs. The case dragged on until February, 1776, when it was settled by compromise. Dr. Witherspoon must have deeply regretted his impetuosity even though his motives were unimpeachable. The full manuscript report of the case is in the archives of His Majesty's Register House at Edinburgh, where the reader (if there ever be another) who struggles

²⁶ *Seasonable Advice to Young Persons.*

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through the reams of legal foolscap, will find at least one bright spot in the closing sentence of the plaintiffs' argument which quotes in extraordinary French a sentence from Molière's *Le Tartuffe* wherein is distinguished the character of true and false zeal. The association of Witherspoon's name with that of Molière's hypocritical imposter sufficiently indicates the personalities employed.

Ashbel Green never heard him allude to the case although it was rumored in America that Dr. Witherspoon had been prosecuted and severely fined, and that friends had settled the claims against him. It was even said that strong opposition had developed against his leaving Scotland because of these unsettled claims. In a memorandum book now lost but which Dr. Green found among the President's papers, there was a record of contributions, many of them anonymous, sent to Witherspoon to help him out of his difficulty. The total was some forty pounds sterling. Dr. McCosh implies that the Snodgrass case influenced Witherspoon in his decision to leave Scotland—his enemies were making Scotland "too hot" for him; but Dr. McCosh's statement is merely a paraphrase of earlier and mistaken writers.

In 1764 while this case was pending, young Snodgrass ran foul of his pastor once more, Witherspoon accusing him of evil conduct, it being alleged that he was seen in compromising circumstances with a notorious woman. But before presbytery he proved his innocence and was exonerated; his accuser had been misled by local gossip.

The entanglement in which his sermon "*Seasonable Advice*" had got him was undoubtedly viewed with joy by his enemies and there must have been expressions of satisfaction that at last the author of *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* had been seriously checked. This production had been by no means forgotten—successive editions were keeping it alive—and it is likely that it was held up against him whenever the opportunity seemed good. Whatever may have been the reason, Mr. Witherspoon decided to defend the satire and especially as he was meditating a return to that form of writing. In 1763, therefore, he rewrote a portion of his synod defence of 1756 and issued it anonymously as a

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Serious Apology dedicated to the "Nobility and Gentry of Scotland particularly such of them as are elders of the Church, and frequently members of the General Assembly," without whose leadership and aid he believes "every attempt for reviving the interest of religion is quite hopeless." In this defense of his famous pamphlet, he discusses it as to subject, literary form, and usefulness. It had been asked if any good resulted, and whether a veil would not have been more charitable and have served the cause of religion better. But he believed on the contrary that the good was served by showing up the clergy if they were at fault. He resented most the accusation that the satire was not the act of a pious man. This was the old accusation against Pascal's *Provincial Letters* in their day, but he points out that now these "ironical witty papers" are not counted against Pascal's piety. The criticism is not sincere. For, where have the enemies of the *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* protested against writing directly leveled at religion itself and published but recently, "taking away the very foundation of morality . . . and bringing in doubt the very being of a God?" Does not this tempt one to repeat Molière's remark in connection with the protest against his *Tartuffe*, that a man may write what he pleaseth against God Almighty in perfect security: but if he write against the character of the clergy in power, he is ruined forever.²⁷ As for the form of his attack men had said why not attack the situation seriously if at all? Were it not better to consider an evil gravely and becomingly, rather than merely to hold it up to ridicule? In defence of the use of satire he cites the Scriptures as well as uninspired writers; but he says that it was the prevailing taste of the age that chiefly induced him to adopt the form he did—"a certain levity prevails at present among all ranks." Indeed he feels that not one-twentieth of the readers of the *Characteristics* will read the *Apology*; they will deny it is by the same author, its style being

²⁷ Evidently referring to the remark of the great Condé quoted by Molière in his preface to the first edition of the *Tartuffe*. The king having wondered why those who were so scandalized by this play raised no objection against *Scaramouche*, the prince replied: "The reason is that *Scaramouche* makes fun of Heaven and religion, about which they don't care; while Molière's play makes fun of themselves, and that is something they cannot stand."

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so different. Men do not care to think; the age is one of mental sluggishness—"Authors of periodical publications such as reviews, magazines, and even common newspapers" all cater to this taste for diluted literature; and to the same cause may be ascribed the "inundation" of novels in recent years. Did the clergy deserve the satire? The laity almost unanimously agreed on its truth and many of the clergy of England gave evidences of their favor. Among them he names the bishops of London, Oxford, and Gloucester. But the strongest proof is the Moderates themselves; the outcry they made with their malice and resentment proved without doubt that his shot had gone home. He goes further in his justification and examines the state of the Church in regard to doctrine, discipline and government, and easily makes out his case. He declares that this *Serious Apology* is due entirely to the unwearied endeavors of many to represent his performance as evidence of an unchristian disposition. He has "not the smallest reason to repent of it on account of the nature, its design, or its effects upon the public." He ends by beseeching all to exert themselves with zeal and activity for the preservation and recovery of the Church, and not despair; and he closes with the final paragraph of his fast sermon in 1758 on *Prayer for National Prosperity*.

The demand for his essay on *Justification* which had appeared first in 1756, coupled with a sense of the prevailing decay of religion that seemed to him to mark the age, induced him in 1764, when on a visit to London, to arrange with the Dilleys to issue a three volume edition of his essays and doctrinal sermons, of which the third volume was a treatise on *Regeneration*, now for the first time printed. In this collection his aim was to establish what he conceived to be the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The preface is dated June, 1764, and the third volume is imprinted the same year, but the other two volumes bear date of 1765, although the collection as a whole was reviewed in the *Scots Magazine*, the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Monthly Review* before the end of 1764.

He was gaining in fame abroad and losing none of his popularity at home. In June, 1764, the University of St. Andrews con-

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ferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity,²⁸ and the Paisley town records of April, 1766, contain this entry:

Act for a Compliment to Mr. John Witherspoon. The said Day the Magistrates and Council considering the Good Services done To ye Community by the Reverend Mr. John Witherspoon minister of ye Gospel in ye Laigh Church Hereby agree To give ye said Mr. Witherspoon a Compliment of fifteen pounds Stirling and authorize ye clerk to draw a precept for ye said sum on ye Treasr which shall be allowed ye Treasr in his accounts.

And in October of the same year the council added twelve pounds sterling to his salary.

At the Assembly of 1766 he was fighting again on behalf of his parish. The presbytery having refused to admit two elders on commissions from Paisley, Dr. Witherspoon protested and the case was referred to the higher court. Both sides were heard by the Assembly and after a lively debate lasting two days the Assembly reversed the presbytery's decision. But Witherspoon's victory was only momentary, for the Assembly further declared that inasmuch as the presbytery had excluded constituent members from voting, the entire election from Paisley was null and void, and, therefore, ordered the names of all Paisley representatives struck from the roll. With the tables now unexpectedly turned, Witherspoon protested against this action vehemently but unavailingly and the engrossed minutes for the year contain no Paisley delegation. Thus Dr. Witherspoon was in the outcome defeated but the debate had good results as it occasioned the passage of a new act on the form of commissions. His disgust must have been supreme, however; for the report of the Assembly's special committee on schism was on the docket for this meeting, and in the great debate that ensued, he was compelled to watch his rival Dr. Robertson lead the Moderate cohorts while he himself, having no standing on the floor, could take part only as a spectator.

²⁸ "St. Andrews June 26, 1764. Sederunt—Rector, Mr. Morton, Dr. Hadow, Mr. Watson, Mr. Wilkie. Conferr'd the Degree of Doctor in Divinity upon the Reverend Mr. John Witherspoon, minister of the Gospel at Paisley." *University Minutes* (MS.) vol. VII, p. 49.

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The position he occupied in the esteem of his parish indicates that, while his public appearances may give the impression that his career was one of constant wrangle, this was hardly the case. He had carried to Paisley the personal qualities that he had shown at Beith although there seem to be no traditions lingering about his ministry in this commercial town. It is only fair to acknowledge that Dr. Witherspoon dearly loved an argument, and it is most probable that he was often and easily baited. One of his own presbyters admitted subsequently that he often opposed him in order to hear what he would say, a statement indirectly supported by the memoirs that somewhat remarkable man, Dr. Somerville of Jedburgh.²⁹ Somerville in his autobiography says that there were few weightier speakers in church courts than Witherspoon, and although his manner was "inanimate and drawling" yet the depth of his judgment, the solidity of his arguments and the aptitude with which they were illustrated and applied "never failed to produce a strong impression on the Assembly."

Dr. Witherspoon had been considering a second venture into the field of satire and in 1765 he issued, anonymously again, a piece of fiction or satirical allegory to which he gave the name of a *History of a Corporation of Servants*. It is a satire on the history of the Christian Church and of the Scottish branch in particular.

The scene is laid in the interior of Brazil whither the survivors of a vessel belonging to Lord Anson's squadron of 1741, cast away on a desert island in the South Seas, finally made their way. They lived here many years as slaves in the court of a powerful prince and at last two of them acquired such favor that they made their way back to Great Britain. One of them described to the author the extraordinary condition of the servants of this realm. The story consists of twelve chapters with an Introduction and a Conclusion, and the key to the whole is found in the idea that the servants are the clergy and the corporation of servants is the Church. With this key in mind the reader understands that the first three chapters relate the growth of the Papacy up to the Reformation, or the formation of the "servants' corporation." At this time "the lands lay uncultivated, the people were

²⁹ Thomas Somerville, *My own Life and Times*, p. 99.

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reduced to the greatest misery imaginable, they were sorrily clothed and worse fed, nobody prospered but the servants, or rather the upper classes of them, the noble and honorable servants, the overseers and arch-overseers." And if anyone dared to raise an accusation against the corporation he was "carried to a dreadful subterranean place and there put to the most horrid and shocking torture which at length ended in death." This the reader will recognize as the Inquisition. Chapter four tells how at last one of the lower servants resolved to open the eyes of the public, and by dint of preaching his notions got some to join him and resolve to return to the old primitive system of service. And thus is the Reformation described. The result was a long series of struggles between the old and the new until finally in a northern province (unnamed, but of course Scotland) the reformers evolved an admirable system of service. The next chapter depicts the prosperity of the northern provinces under the new scheme, until the establishment of a law empowering great men to nominate servants to inferior families (the law of patronage), when degeneration set in. One party of servants (the Moderates in thin disguise) used all manner of arts and force to appoint servants in families, and "matters drove on heavily for a while." The next two chapters describe the unfitness of many so-called servants under the conditions now prevalent, and particularly owing to the ridiculous methods of testing them and examining their credentials and testimonials, the allusion here being to Wither-
spoon's opinion of the younger clergy of the day. The eighth chapter brings the story up to the publication of *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*. The good and bad servants were distributed over the country and one of the good servants, who was an opponent of prevalent conditions, fell upon the singular device of drawing

a picture of the droll or ludicrous kind, in which by enigmatical characters he represented the various impositions of the servants in general; he also took off the likeness of the principal and most active leaders of the corporation, and put them in the most comical postures imaginable,

and the postures are described. The furore that the picture created is then portrayed. A whole chapter is devoted to an ac-

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count of a debate in the corporation on the propriety of driving out all the "strange cattle" (the schism of 1763), and mending the fences which were in so sorry a condition, a debate which was futile in its results. The following chapter discusses the ambition and covetousness of the servants and their interest in a multitude of other things than their duties, and cites as an example one who was most successful at story-telling, and especially stories of heroic action of his people's predecessors; he immediately gave over all work in the family to which he belonged, and when he was civilly put in mind of his neglect he told his critics that they might go about their business for they were a pack of seditious slanderers. Thus might Principal Robertson the historian, whose first work had been a history of Scotland, have seen himself caricatured. The two closing chapters of this curious work are given over to depicting the attitude of the people in view of the proceedings of their servants.

In a way the story is clever, especially in the parallel which is well sustained; but it is undeniably heavy; and it seems to have fallen flat. One is of course immediately put in mind of Gulliver and it is very possible that Dr. Witherspoon got his idea from Dean Swift with whose writings he was familiar. It would be interesting to know whether he had read Voltaire's *Micromegas* which was still new. The work lacks the spontaneity of the *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, and although its purpose is the same as that of the earlier effort, the chastening of the Moderates, public interest in the struggle between them and the Popular party was on the wane. In regard to that controversy, the public at large, like the people of the north provinces in the story, "rubbed on as well as they could."

Dr. Ashbel Green, whose interpretation of the work has been followed in the account given above, found several other pieces of satire among Dr. Witherspoon's unpublished papers, which he destroyed as they were of local concern or about individuals long dead. Dr. Witherspoon's next publication of the sort belongs to his American period. The *Corporation of Servants* is his only preserved effort of prose fiction, and his most ambitious piece of imaginative writing.

During the summer of 1766 he received a call to Dublin which

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he declined; but a few months later a very different call was coming, which decline as he would, he could not evade, and which ultimately he was to accept as a summons to higher responsibility and greater opportunity than hitherto had been his lot.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CALL TO PRINCETON

ON July 17, 1766, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Finley, fifth President of the College of New Jersey at Princeton, died in Philadelphia whither he had gone for medical treatment. For a month past his recovery had been despaired of, and in anticipation of his death the trustees of the college must have given thought to the choice of his successor. But no formal decision had been reached when they adjourned after their regular meeting at Commencement in September; and a special meeting was called in November at which to choose the man who should be their sixth President.

The colonial period, first of the four great periods into which the history of Princeton University divides itself, was ended, and the second—the Revolutionary period—was beginning. Each of the five colonial Presidents had contributed something to the character of the institution during the twenty years of its existence. Jonathan Dickinson, the leading Presbyterian clergyman of his day, had assisted at its faltering inception; the Reverend Aaron Burr had given it material body and the color of his own piety and graciousness; Samuel Davies had lent it an incipient nationalism and a certain element of culture; even the brief hour of Jonathan Edwards' rule had brought it lustre; and these foundations Dr. Finley had strengthened with his firm though stolid qualities. Through two decades these men, one after the other, had toilingly planted and watered, and their successor, a greater than they, was to take up their effort and give it breadth and flexibility, virility and permanence, and in an administration of more than a quarter of a century was to gather the real first-fruits.

A precedent that was to remain unbroken until the twentieth century insisted that the head of the college be a Presbyterian clergyman; the labor of the task required of him physical and mental robustness; the aims and young traditions of the college

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demanded that he be of unquestioned piety, preferably of reputation as an author, and possessed of as broad culture and wide scholarship as the age provided. And there did not appear to be in the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, nor even among the New England friends of the college, any man of such acknowledged attainments, such long standing in the ministry, and such general weight of character, as to satisfy these requirements.

On November 19, the trustees reassembled at Princeton with minds made up, and although the minutes of the meeting state that only after "mature deliberation" did they elect to the vacant presidency the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon of Paisley, in Scotland, yet it may be assumed for reasons which shall appear, that most of the deliberation had taken place before the meeting. Whose was the bold suggestion, the flash of eternal wisdom, that first brought the Scotsman's name into consideration we shall perhaps never know, but the decision was no blind lucky leap in the dark. Dr. Witherspoon's career since the publication of *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* must have enlisted the approval of most if not all American Presbyterians. Very probably for once they would have agreed even with the Unitarian, Dr. John Lathrop of Boston, that in the famous satire could be found "many characters in this part of the world, painted out very exactly," and they would have endorsed his wish that every minister in America "would read it once a month."¹ Dr. Witherspoon's attitude was the one they would have taken on the vital questions of patronage, abuse of power, and degeneration of religious life. His name must have been frequently on the pens of those Scottish divines who periodically exchanged with their transatlantic brethren interminable epistles on the state of religion; and although no American edition of his writings had as yet appeared his treatise on *Justification*, his *Inquiry into the Stage*, and possibly his latest essay—that on *Regeneration*—not to mention his doctrinal sermons, had crossed the ocean and won admiration. Some Americans at least had read in the *Scots Magazine* his early essay in reply to Lord Kames on the philosophy of common sense, for the Reverend Mr. Bellamy who first had it

¹ Sprague, *Annals*, vol. VIII, p. 71. Letter of June 28, 1768.



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called to his attention had no reason to keep its authorship a secret. It is certain that Dr. Witherspoon's position in the Church of Scotland and a corresponding anticipation of his potential influence in America had more weight with the trustees of the College of New Jersey than any educational qualifications he may have possessed. Dr. Francis Alison, an honorary graduate of Princeton and vice-provost of the University of Pennsylvania, or the College of Philadelphia, declared to the Reverend Ezra Stiles of Connecticut that the Princeton trustees knew nothing of Witherspoon's academic abilities; he was esteemed as a "keen satirical writer," but whether he could teach anything but divinity "was hard to say." Dr. Alison's reference² to him as "one Wetherspoon, a minister in Paisley in Scotland" indicates neither acquaintance nor cordiality on his part, but rather the note of academic disdain for an outsider. In all the extant letters relating to the election the emphasis is placed on Witherspoon's ecclesiastical rather than his educational value to the colonies. Nevertheless, there could have been little question that his university training was of the best, that his success as a minister of the gospel was a fact and his piety beyond suspicion; and he was entering the prime of manhood. Added to these qualities was the belief that he would prove a tower of strength in the episcopate controversy through which the Colonies were at that time passing; and back of it all, intangible but by no means unimportant, there lay in his favor the attraction and prestige that British birth and British training and experience still held in the eyes of American colonials. The choice of this man for their President was not only an act of excellent common sense on the part of the trustees of the College of New Jersey, but it proved to be a stroke of unexpected genius.

A copy of the minute of election together with a letter praying acceptance, signed by the Honorable William Peartree Smith, acting president of the board, was sent to Dr. Witherspoon, addressed in the care of Mr. Richard Stockton, a lawyer of Princeton and a graduate and trustee of the College, who happened to be in London.

²Stiles MSS., Yale University Library. Alison to Stiles, December 4, 1766.

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Nassau Hall, Princeton, New Jersey.
November 19th, 1766

Rev^d Sir

The Trustees of the College of New Jersey, actuated by the most sensible concern for the future welfare of that rising Seminary, (already become of unspeakable importance to Religion, and the Presbyterian cause in North America) under the late afflicting Providence, in removing by death their President, the Rev^d & Worthy Dr. Samuel Finley, have employed their anxious thoughts, for several Months past, in looking out, both at Home & abroad, for a Gentleman, properly qualified, to succeed him in that important & conspicuous Station.

Having maturely considered the various & important interests, which, under God, appear in a great degree, to depend upon the future Prosperity of the College of New Jersey; and having considered also the character You Sir sustain in the Church of Scotland & in the learned World—the Trustees, (this Day convened for the purpose of election,) cheerfully proceeded to elect and did elect Dr. Witherspoon to the President's Chair. Inclosed is a Copy of the Minute of the transaction, extracted from their Record of Proceedings.

You will immediately perceive, Sr that there are very weighty reasons which have led this Board to request you to undertake the disagreeable task of breaking from your present Connections & undergoing the difficulties of a Voyage to a distant Country. We trust, however, the noble Cause you will promote in this Station of first Eminence in the Church in these Southern Provinces, and the great Ends your Compliance will answer to Religion & Learning in general thro' out all the Colonies will afford You a more than proportionable degree of Satisfaction. And this Board do assure you that nothing in their power shall be wanting to render your Life here comfortable and happy.

The Situation of the College is in a very populous, agreeable & healthy Country, upon an elevated tract of Ground, in a clear and wholesome Air; the latter appears from the uncommon State of Health which hath always been remarkable among the Students & Inhabitants of the Village. The Loss of four Presidents in the Compass of a few Years, hath been owing to Singular circumstances, & occasioned by a variety of Infirmities which attended them previous to their removal to Nassau Hall. Mr. Burr, the first who had presided, was a gentleman of infirm Constitution, almost worn out before he came to the College. Mr. Edwards dyed of the Small Pox. Mr. Davies

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constitutionally prone to inflammatory disorder being let Blood, on a Cold he had taken, an inflammation seized his Arm, which brought on a fever, & proved mortal. Dr. Finley dyed of a Schirrous Liver & consequent Dropsey, the foundation of which disorder was laid some years before his appointment. These things are so particularly mentioned to you Sr, to remove any apprehension of the insalubrity of the Climate, which we can assure you is as healthy here as in any part of N. America.

The Stated Salary annexed to the Office is £250 Curr^y equal to £146 Sterl^s (exch. generally being at 70 p c^t) A large handsome & commodious Dwelling-House is provided for the use of the President, together with a good Garden & sufficient Quantity of Land to furnish him Winter-Fuel & Pasturage. The Perquisites, *communibus annis*, may be about £40 Curr.^y The whole, upon moderate valuation, being estimated at £350 Curr^y equal to 206 Ster^s. The trustees are sorry that the state of the College Funds puts it out of their power, at present, to offer you a more ample Reward. They further agreed & have Voted, to allow (in case of your Acceptance) One hundred Guineas for defraying Expences of your removal & Voyage; and that the Salary commence on the Day of your Arrival in America.

We ardently pray, that Providence may make your way plain before you, for the acceptance of their choice trusting in the great Head of the Church, that He will make the eminent Talents he hath afforded you, much more eminently & conspicuously useful to the general Cause of Christianity & the Interests of Virtue & Literature at the Head of this Seminary, than in the Station now assigned You.

We have by this Opportunity written to Richard Stockton Esq^r a Member of this Board, now in London on his private Affairs, praying him, if his Business will permit, to wait upon You at Paisley, as soon as he conveniently can. He is a Gentleman of Fortune & Figure in his Profession of the Law, of distinguished Abilities, & Influence here, and a warm Friend to the interests of Religion & Learning. He is thoroly acquainted with the State of our Affairs religious & political, capable of giving the most authentic informations, and answering the minutest Enquiries. In him therefore Sr you may place absolute Confidence. The printed Account of the College inclosed will also give you more ample Information than can be contained in the bounds of a Letter, of the State of the Institution.

We would not impolitely urge a too hasty Resolution in an Affair of such importance to Dr. Witherspoon; But as he will necessarily reflect that the College of New Jersey must, while unprovided of a

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Head, labour under great Difficulties & Disadvantages, his Determination with all convenient Dispatch will be highly acceptable to the Board.

By order & in Presence of the Trustees of the College of New Jersey,
Signed by Reverend Sr.

Your most Obedient, and
very humble Servant
Wm. P. Smith Pres^{dt} of Trustees^s

With this letter was forwarded a copy of the official *Account of the College of New Jersey* published in 1764. Duplicates of these documents were sent to Mr. Dennis DeBerdt, the London agent of the province of New Jersey, to be used in case Mr. Stockton were not in the city. Mr. Stockton was also informed that the board would defray his expenses if he would go to Paisley and present the election to Dr. Witherspoon in person and urge him to accept.

It cannot be said that Dr. Witherspoon's election was hasty; but there was no waste of time, and the reason for prompt action is found in the ecclesiastical politics of the time. The American Presbyterian Church was divided into two parties, the Old Side and the New. With the latter the college had been associated since its origin and the other party had never been allowed any real share in its control. On the whole the college had risen steadily in reputation until by the time of President Finley's death it was unquestionably the leading American institution of higher learning having Presbyterian affiliations. Old Side candidates for the ministry were, however, meeting at their trials such "hard measures from the ministers in y^e favor of Jersey college under a pretence of examining their style," says Dr. Alison, that they were finding it almost impossible to pass those trials and Anglicans were advising them to leave the Presbyterian fold with its "narrow persecuting bigots" and cast their lot with them.⁴ To obviate these circumstances the Old Side party had recently resolved to send all their boys to Princeton, "very persuaded that, were all students bred under the same professors in the same col-

³ Green MS., the original received by Dr. Witherspoon. A copy is in the Minutes of the Board.

⁴ Stiles MSS., Alison to Stiles, December 4, 1766.

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lege, our disputes would end.”⁵ But the college needed a larger faculty; the business of the Presidency, added to a heavy schedule of teaching, was too much for one man to handle; tutors, efficient or otherwise, were constantly on the move, and the college naturally suffered from so many changes in its teaching staff; in fact, the opinion was alleged to exist in some circles that the college had been on the decline ever since Mr. Burr’s death and that the students were not getting a fair return for their time and money spent at Nassau Hall. Moreover, a suspicion that the Anglican Church was endeavoring to get control of American educational institutions of learning, its achievement in this direction in New York and Philadelphia, and indications that Governor Franklin of New Jersey was trying to bring about similar results at Princeton, together with the underlying fear of the establishment of an American episcopate which would further hamper the liberties of non-Anglican bodies, made it evident that the sooner Presbyterians buried their differences and united their forces the better would be their position to cope with that branch of the Christian Church which they called “the enemy.”

Therefore as the College of New Jersey was now without a President and was sorely in need of funds, the Old Side deemed the time ripe for an effort to win by fair bargain an adequate share in the management of the institution with whose fortunes they believed the destinies of American Presbyterianism to be inevitably involved. An overture was accordingly prepared in Philadelphia looking toward this end, and at the special meeting of the board of trustees of the College in November, 1766, accompanied by a group of lawyers and other prominent citizens who were to support it with their presence and their oratory, there appeared a delegation of ministers appointed by the Old Side party in Philadelphia to lay before the trustees a petition and a letter—“a very strenuous letter”—bearing twenty-six signatures and outlining the Old Side’s proposition. This included, besides the election of a President, the appointment of at least three

⁵ Alison to Stiles, *loc. cit.* This is the probable explanation of the sudden doubling of the graduating class in 1765 and 1766. The size of the average class from 1760 to 1764 had been sixteen; in 1765 and 1766 it was thirty-one; during the interregnum of 1767 it dropped to eleven.

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other professors, one of divinity and two of the sciences, who should cover other subjects in the curriculum; and in return the petitioners proposed not only to establish funds but also to open subscriptions for a number of years to increase those funds. And recognizing the unhappy differences existing in the Church, the petitioners suggested that the President and one of the professors should be elected from the Old Side and the other two professors from the New Side. Acceptance of the proposal would mean an immediate increase of students, faculty, and funds. Altogether the proposal from several points of view was a generous one and bade well to end the dissension in the Church, besides promising distinct advance in the efficiency of the College; it would have been more generous had the choice of an Old Side President not been one of its terms.

According to Mr. Samuel Purviance, Jr., a Philadelphia merchant closely sharing Old Side counsels, the plans were kept secret until the last moment, a copy of the memorial being sent to the trustees only just before the meeting.

So Sensible are we of the narrow Biggotry of our Brethren ye New Lights, wrote he to Ezra Stiles, that we dare not disclose these our benevolent & generous views for fear of defeating our Intentions; by apprizing them beforehand Schemes wd. be laid to oppose us in this most Salutory Measure; so that we hope to take our Friends off their Guard; on this Acct the Design is intedd to be kept private amongst us until near the Time of Election; If this looks like Cunning, I'm sure its such as you'll approve where the Intention is so good. Its needless to point out to a Person who can so readily see, how many Advantages wd. naturally arise from this scheme; It wd. in general kill ye Seeds of Narrow Principle, Unite our at present divided Strength, Raise a Number of able Labourers for ye Vineyard & Render us a formidable Barrier agst both Civil & Religious Encroachers. I can hardly suffer myself to despair of success in these noble Aims. . . . If we succeed in Uniting our Strength in the Jersey College & the intended Union with our Friends in N: Engd I shan't much regard what our Enemies can do agst. Us.⁶

Judging by the background of ecclesiastical politics suggested in this very frank exposition of the plan, Dr. Witherspoon, if not

⁶ Stiles MSS., Letter of November 1, 1766.

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exactly stepping from a Scottish frying-pan into an American fire, nevertheless must have found himself in an element not altogether unfamiliar when he transferred his allegiance from the parent Church to its colonial offspring.

The scheme described by Mr. Purviance leaked out; the trustees of the College were not taken off their guard; and the Old Side promoters found that they had sadly miscalculated the strength of their fellow ministers' pride. Even the gain to the general cause of Presbyterianism against the feared encroachments of Anglicanism was not sufficient to carry the day. Despite the reunion of the rival synods, the wounds of the old schism which had split the Church were not quite healed; the College was still too personal an asset for the New Side group to share, and the trustees with less charity perhaps than good luck forestalled their petitioners as we have seen by nominating as President a man whose affiliations were neutral to be sure, but who nevertheless was a man of their own choosing, and elected in such a way as to intimate with more firmness perhaps than delicacy, that they would brook no interference; and then they received the Philadelphia delegates. The latter acknowledged themselves disconcerted by the election that had just taken place, their proposal being contingent on a vacant presidency, and they hastily retired, declining to engage for the future conduct of their constituents. Privately, they complained that their reception had been cold and very impolite and their memorial treated with contempt.⁷

After the Philadelphians had withdrawn, the trustees passed a somewhat superfluous resolution to the effect that while they would gladly do everything in their power to bring about harmony among all the patrons of religion and sound learning and would welcome the increase of the faculty of the College, yet they did not feel warranted in electing additional professors until they saw the means of paying their salaries. It may be added, to conclude this none too creditable story, that negotiations were generously renewed by the Philadelphians the next year, waiving all

⁷ Stiles MSS., Alison to Stiles, December 4, 1766, and Purviance to Stiles, December 13, 1766.

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party considerations, and a compromise was effected whereby one Old Side trustee was elected to the board and three professors to the faculty, John Blair, Dr. Hugh Williamson of Philadelphia, and Jonathan Edwards, Jr., already a tutor in the College. Of these Mr. Blair alone entered on his duties. The Old Side promised aid in securing funds for the maintenance of these chairs but after the arrival of Dr. Witherspoon the plans were annulled by the board, the funds not having materialized. With the resignation of Professor Blair in 1769, the new President had a free field, and two years later fresh plans for enlarging the faculty were taken up similar in scope to those of 1766 and, thanks to the strength of Dr. Witherspoon's personality, free from party trammels, but only to be brought to naught by the Revolutionary War.

Dr. Francis Alison, who had been slated for the presidency in case the Old Side proposal were adopted, was one of the first to admit that Witherspoon's acceptance would be a likely way to reunite the Presbyterian body; but by certain other members of his party the action of the trustees was bitterly resented, and a contemptible effort seems to have been made by the irreconcilables to wreck the effort to get Dr. Witherspoon. A letter was written from Philadelphia to the President-elect, seeming to encourage his acceptance but really calculated to produce the opposite result. And it partially succeeded. Mr. Stockton declared that this "artful, plausible, yet wickedly contrived letter" more than anything else originally deterred Dr. Witherspoon from entertaining serious thoughts of accepting his call to America.⁸

At first Mr. Stockton was disinclined to make the trip to Paisley. It was February, 1767, when he received the trustees' commission of the preceding November and he found it difficult to decide which was worse, the weather or the roads. Persuaded at

⁸No copy of the letter appears to have been preserved. The documents on which the account given above is based are in Hageman, *History of Princeton*, vol. I, p. 79, Field, *Provincial Courts of New Jersey*, vol. I, pp. 288, 386, and the *Henley Smith Papers* in the Library of Congress. Maclean says the letter was written from Princeton, but Mr. Stockton saw the original and could hardly have been mistaken in dating it from Philadelphia. Benjamin Rush also speaks of it as coming from Philadelphia.

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length to go to Paisley he discovered that, in spite of letters urgent and descriptive sent to Dr. Witherspoon from America,⁹ neither he nor his friends had "any Tolerable idea" of the place to which he was invited, nor did they have any notion of the importance of the college over which he was asked to preside. One and all opposed his acceptance. Mr. Stockton was able to overcome the effect of the Philadelphia letter and to remove Dr. Witherspoon's own objections and he even took upon himself, in view of an unaccountable discrepancy as to salary discovered in the trustees' letter, to stand by the sum therein named—three hundred and fifty pounds proclamation money and perquisites, instead of the two hundred and fifty pounds proclamation and perquisites originally voted.¹⁰

The following letter written on the last day of February by Dr. Witherspoon to Mr. Archibald Wallace, an Edinburgh merchant, and now among the manuscripts in the Presbyterian Historical Society at Philadelphia, alludes to this important question, but is more particularly interesting because of the hint it contains as to the chief, and hitherto unmentioned, obstacle in the way of his acceptance.

Dear Sir:

Mr. Stockton would inform you how he found matters here. Though no material alteration has happened since he left us yesterday having so important a matter under consideration I read over again the Trustees' letter this morning and observed a circumstance which I had overlooked before, that they mention the fixed Salary of the President to be £250 Currency, and the perquisites about £40 Currency, and yet make the whole amount to £350 Currency, £206 Sterling. From my not being accustomed to comparing Currency & Sterling I did not observe that particular when at Edinburgh, but now perceive that they must have estimated the House and Pasturage to make up the

⁹One of the most charming of these communications was from the Reverend Dr. John Rodgers of New York, written on Christmas Eve, 1766. He sits down at midnight—the ship sails in the morning—to seize the opportunity to send a few lines, to tell Dr. Witherspoon who Mr. Stockton is, and to say that young Benjamin Rush will call upon him, and finally to give him some idea of the position to which he had been called. The original is in the papers with the Green MS.

¹⁰President Finley's salary had been four hundred pounds proclamation but the poor financial condition of the College had necessitated the reduction.

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sum total. Now this is so greatly inferior to the offer which I refused from Dublin last summer, where the work is less burdensome, that when I came to explain matters with my wife and friends, I knew not what to say to it.

I have writ this because I expect Mr. Stockton will not leave Edinburgh on Monday, so that you may have an opportunity of speaking to him in case I have yet committed any mistake.

From the persuasion of you and the other friends at Edinburgh, and what Mr. Stockton has said of the state of religion in America, I find a pretty favorable inclination in my own mind to the proposal, though many difficulties lie in the way.

My wife recovered her spirits a good deal yesterday night after Mr. Stockton left us, and spoke a good deal in praise of him as a man of excellent sense and fine behaviour, but whether this arose in part from expectation that the affair was wholly over, I cannot say.

I believe I need scarcely beg your Sympathy and the assistance of your prayers on this weighty occasion, as I dare say they will not be wanting. I would have writ more but am straitened in time.

I am with compliments to all friends, dear Sir

Your's &c

Mr. Stockton was not able to win over Mrs. Witherspoon in spite of the good impression he made on her, an impression he left behind him wherever he went. But in this case his eloquence, his wit, his good looks and polished manners, his air of brains and breeding, were of no avail. In London he had been received by Government with every mark of respect; the corporation of Edinburgh had given him a public dinner at which the freedom of the city was presented to him, and it is said that the town of Paisley did him similar honor. His mission to North Britain was common talk, and the rumor even got abroad in Edinburgh that Dr. Witherspoon had accepted, that he was already collecting books for the college library, and that he would sail for America in the spring. But none of these things moved Mrs. Witherspoon; and early in March Mr. Stockton paid a second visit to Paisley for the specific purpose of converting her. Again he had counted without his hostess. She was a quiet, home-loving body with a numerous family; she disliked change of abode; she had in fact objected to her husband's removal from Beith to Paisley; still more strenuously then did she protest against this unheard-of

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transatlantic migration. Even the crafty suggestion that she would find it easier to live in Princeton than at Paisley, the former "being the cheapest place in America"—a distinction it has long since ceased to earn—had not influenced her, and she would not so much as see the smooth-speaking American lawyer the second time. Nothing daunted, Mr. Stockton resorted to strategy and proselytised, so he says, all the eminent clergy of Edinburgh and Glasgow by putting the case of the College of New Jersey before them in such a way that they not only changed their own minds as to the oughtness of Dr. Witherspoon's acceptance of the presidency, but even agreed if necessary to attack Mrs. Witherspoon in her own entrenchments and take her position by storm. March went by, however, and no decision had been reached. From London in April Mr. Stockton wrote once more asking for an answer, as he proposed leaving England by the first of May; he knows how seriously Dr. Witherspoon had been taking the matter into consideration and what attention he has given to the facts in the case; he hopes the obstacles which at first showed themselves have not been insurmountable; what shall he say on his return to America if Dr. Witherspoon refuses, and what will his fellow-trustees do? "Shall we turn to our old antagonists and thereby let them in by wholesale or shall we make them greater enemies than ever before by totally neglecting them? I am pained when I think of the consequences of your determining against us."¹¹

But the lady in the question had been holding out bravely and her husband finally capitulated. The matter he said had given him such uneasiness—"the greatest that ever anything of the kind did"—that he could not dismiss it from his mind. And on April 18, 1767, he wrote to Mr. Stockton that the family difficulties were insurmountable although he himself was inclined to favor the plan. "My wife continued in such distress on the subject that for some weeks after you left us she was scarcely ever half a day out of bed at a time till I told her at any rate to make herself easy, for whatever inclination I might have to it, the Removal was of such a nature that I could not insist upon it unless she could be brought to agree to it." Since then they had talked

¹¹ Presbyterian Historical Society MSS. Letter of April 14, 1767.

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about it, and he had hopes sometimes it might go through; but now he had little or none. "It has been a time of utmost anxiety and difficulty to me," he concluded; he could not have stood any longer the state of uncertainty and suspense, and he had therefore decided to write his declination as soon as Mr. Stockton would tell him to whom it should be addressed.¹²

The formal letter of declination sent to the trustees has not been preserved. Benjamin Rush, a graduate of Princeton, at that time studying medicine at Edinburgh, on hearing the news wrote a despondent letter to Dr. Witherspoon beginning: "And must poor Nassau Hall indeed be ruined?" Three quarto pages of hysterical language follow, foretelling what will happen to the College; he hopes its dissolution will not be laid to Dr. Witherspoon's door:

O Nassau Hall, Nassau Hall, in vain rescued and cherished by every Lover of religion, since thou art to fall into the Hands of some—but I cannot express it—my Heart bleeds within me—O Nassau Hall, Nassau Hall.

After this amazing outburst the young medical student got control of himself again and concluded his epistle with an apology: "Pray excuse the Freedom I have assumed and attribute it to my Zeal for the College."¹³

With more practical sense Dr. Witherspoon, unable to go to America himself, now devoted his attention to naming a substitute, and when in May he received a visit from Rush, who was acting the part of Mr. Stockton's understudy, he suggested an old friend, the Reverend Charles Nesbit of Montrose, whose name had already been mentioned in the connection. To Nesbit Witherspoon wrote urging acceptance if called, and to Mr. Stockton he sent a long and fine letter of recommendation of the new possibility.¹⁴

¹² Green MS. The original letter.

¹³ Green MS. The original letter.

¹⁴ The letter is among the papers with the Green MS. It can hardly be necessary to do more than dismiss again with contempt the legend mentioned by Dr. Alexander Carlyle, and similarly dismissed by him, to the effect that Nesbit was Witherspoon's natural son. Dr. Nesbit's parentage is easily authenticated in the Scottish parish records.



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But Dr. Nesbit appears to have totally refused to consider the question although he did call on Rush; and his name was never formally brought before the trustees. A week later Rush wrote to his classmate Jonathan Bayard Smith a letter which indicates that he had not yet given up hope. The letter, moreover, furnishes corroboration of the assertion that an attempt was made from America to deter Dr. Witherspoon, and it also gives us the only contemporary description of Dr. Witherspoon that we have.¹⁵

Doc^r. Witherspoon has not yet determined any way with Regard to ye College.¹⁶ His Mind I know has a Strong Biass to America but Alas! he is Obliged as yet to plead yt. he has married a Wife and cannot come. I have dined and supped frequently wth. him here in Edin^r; and am charmed with his Behaviour. he appears to be Mr. Davies and Dr. Finley reviv'd in One man. in point of Genius he is equal to ye first, and in Knowledge I believe he is superior even to Dr. Finley himself, more especially in yt. Branch of Knowledge which is now a days so much admired viz: the Belles-Lettres. I have heard him preach twice, and can truly say he exceeds any Preacher I have heard since I came to Scotland—indeed I have heard few Preachers in ye Course of my Life that were equal to him. his Voice has much of that mellody in it w^{ch}. we used so much admire in the late Mr. Bostwick. his Appearance in the Pulpit is Solemn and gracefull. his Sermons are loadned wth. good Sense, and adorned at ye same time wth. all the Elegance and Beauty that Language can give them. And what above all enhances these Accomplishments in him as a Preacher is, that he never carries a Note wth. him in the Pulpit, so that I am in hopes sh^d. he go to the College he will by his Example put an End to the too common Practise of reading Sermons in America, more especially among our young ministers. May that Providence w^{ch}. has formed him wth. such great Endowments, and w^{ch}. I trust directed ye Eyes of ye College towards him, remove all Obstructions from Out of his Way, and make ye path of Duty clear before him. I think the College of New Jersey would flourish as much under him as ever it has done under any of his Predecessors. He is the Homo factus ad Unguem, and is admirably calculated for overthrowing all the Stratagems of those who have hitherto combined to ruin our College. I have wrote to him twice, and plead with him to embrace the Offer in as strong Terms as if I was

¹⁵ Library of Congress. *Henley Smith Papers*, Letter of April 30, 1767.

¹⁶ Rush is mistaken. Witherspoon had decided by April 18.

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pleading for my Life. I took y^e Liberty of sending him a Copy of that part of your Letter w^{ch}. related to his Election, and to the Schemes of Govr. Franklin, Dr. Allison &c wth. Regard to the College. I was very happy in finding it exactly coincide wth. what I had told him before,— here my Friend I could unfold a Secret to you that would excite your manly Indignation, and rouse up all y^e Jersey Scholar in you. good Mr. Tulford the Seceding Minister in Philada. and one Mr. Clash a Seceding Minister in New York, each of them wrote to Dr. Witherspoon and urged his embracing the Call from the most benevolent & disinterested motives. they likewise wrote to several of their Friends here to use their utmost Influence to prevail wth. y^e Doctor. may Heaven reward them for their Piety and Public-Spirit: the Case was widely different from this wth. certain Gentlemen in Philada. happy for the College Mr. Stockton had it in his power fully to refute all y^e Aspersions that were thrown upon it, and to obviate the Accounts that arrived here (wth: y^e Acct. of y^e Doctor's Election) of y^e "Bigotry"—"Faction"—"Ignorance," "Narrow Views," "little Management"—"want of Discipline," "raw Tutors," "weak illiterate Presidents," and entire Loss of Reputation, w^{ch}. have hitherto prevailed at the College of New Jersey. Methinks I see your Cheeks redden wth. Resentment; but for a while suspend your Rage my Friend. they did this from the most friendly Motives, and from a real Desire to advance y^e Interest of y^e College, it was wth. a view of prevailing upon Doc^r. Witherspoon to come and rescue the unhappy College from y^e Hands of Bigotry—Superstition and Ignorance. May heaven reward them for their Piety and Public Spirit! Remember my dear Jonathan this is only inter Nos. Mr. Stockton will unravel the whole Secret to you. in y^e mean time let w^t I have hinted to you remain a profound Secret in y^r. own Bosom. May y^e College of New Jersey be overwhelmed wth. an earthquake on y^e day in w^{ch}. Dr:—— or Mr. —— get a Footing there!

Dr. Witherspoon's letter of declination was read at the trustees' meeting at Princeton in October, 1767, and they at once, and rather hastily, elected to the vacant presidency the Reverend Samuel Blair of Boston, a graduate of the class of 1760; and the first act of this academic comedy closed.

But in the meantime at Paisley a change had taken place. Having gained her point in May, Mrs. Witherspoon had straightway weakened. During the early summer Rush spent several days at Paisley and Mrs. Witherspoon at last had given him a

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calm hearing and had argued the whole matter out with him, until finally he had talked away her fears and objections, and in August she had given her consent to the move, if now her husband should be re-elected.¹⁷

The Reverend Charles Beatty, a trustee of the college, visiting Scotland that summer took the opportunity to go to Paisley and was agreeably disappointed in the wife of the Laigh Kirk's minister. Instead of the "poor, peevish, reserved, discontented" lady he had expected to find, he met a "well-looking, genteel, open, friendly woman—which perhaps you will be surprised at." She regretted her rudeness to Mr. Stockton, and explained it by saying that "she was in a weak state of health and that in that situation things appeared very gloomy to her—crossing the sea, and that her husband might soon die, and she be left in a strange land &c."¹⁸

Benjamin Rush at Edinburgh had gone into ecstasies over the new turn of affairs. On the twenty-third of October he sent this letter to Dr. Witherspoon (the enclosure referred to has not been preserved):

My dear Sir:

Last night I received the enclosed letter from one Mr. Smith in Philadelphia, a gentleman of distinguished worth, and one whose strong attachment to the College of New Jersey, renders the intelligence contained in the letter such as may entirely be depended upon. I thought it best to send it to you, as I could not conveniently extract those passages more particularly which relate to that College.

You will see that the Trustees, so far from being in the least irritated against you for your refusal, are pleased with your extensive views and just notions of the importance of the College. You will likewise see in what dangers and difficulties that College is involved, how thick and fast its enemies increase, and how much the hearts of its pious friends are trembling for fear the united forces of civil and religious Combinations will end in the ruin of the College.—

Oh, Sir, does not your heart expand with unutterable sentiments of love and benevolence when you think that you are to be the means of

¹⁷ Green MS. Archibald Wallace to Mr. Stockton, August 22, 1767; also Biddle, *Memorial of Benjamin Rush*, p. 29.

¹⁸ C. Beatty to R. Treat, October 15, 1767, in *Scotch Irish in America*, 9th Congress, 1900, p. 72; Maclean, vol. I, p. 385.

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rescuing so important a Seminary from ruin? Don't you some time Anticipate the transport of being received with ten thousand welcomes the moment you land in America? and of being at the head of an Institution on which the spreading of the Gospel through the wide extended continent of America now entirely depends?—to preside over that College methinks is a Province worthy of an Angel! I am very Confident the Trustees cannot have a President till four months after they receive your refusal, not only from what I know of the laws of the College, but from what I heard Mr. Stockton say when in Edinburgh. The law was strictly adhered to in Mr. Davies' case. Four months elapsed between the time of his refusal and second election. The ship you enquire after sailed from London to New York the 2nd. of September. You need not send the enclosed letter to town till you come yourself. My best compliments to Mrs. Witherspoon.¹⁹

Mr. Archibald Wallace, the Edinburgh merchant, had already hastily dispatched a letter to Mr. Stockton informing him of Mrs. Witherspoon's surrender; and Dr. Witherspoon himself had immediately written, discreetly hinting that a re-election would meet with a favorable answer. To this Mr. Stockton replied November 5, explaining the election of Mr. Blair.

Rev. & dear Sir

Princeton, Nov. 5, 1767

Your two letters dated in August last came to hand a few days ago—the pains you have taken in endeavoring to find out, and in recommending a proper person for the president of New Jersey College as mentioned in your first Letter shows your attention to its Interests: but your consent to become its president yourself as hinted in your last, altho' an unexpected, yet is a much stronger and more acceptable evidence to the Trustees of your regard to that institution. You will perhaps suppose it unhappy that before the agreeable account of Mrs. Witherspoon's consent and your determination thereon had reached us, that we had filled the place by electing Mr. Blair; but by a strange coincidence of circumstances, it is hoped that the election will only seem to manifest the regard of the Govrs of the College to that Gentleman, and at the same time not prevent them from final choice.

The Trustees doubted not of Mr. Blair's acceptance when they elected him, and supposed that as one of the professors was his uncle, altho the President was so young he the uncle being satisfied would

¹⁹ Presbyterian Historical Society MSS.

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influence in conciliating the others. But whether true or false it seems Mr. Blair has been informed that his youth will make him inadmissible among his Brethren upon such terms as he would chuse, and therefore before we heard from Scotland it was generally said that Mr. Blair was so much disgusted that he certainly would not come in; but now every one says that as he is as famous for his modesty as for his Learning and other valuable "Qualifications" he will not hesitate to declare in the negative. If that should be the case the Trustees will meet immediately and re-elect you; and there is not the least doubt but it will be unanimous; for the News of your Consent to come apparently inspires every friend of the College with Joy—they say it will effectually make up the ancient quarell among the presbyterians here, will open a more easy & advantageous communication with North Britain &c. &c. &c. in short your coming seems now the common Topic of conversation and every one is pleased with the prospect. My present hurry prevents my being very particular and as I expect we shall have Occasion of writing you soon again there is less need of it.

You'll please tell Mrs. Witherspoon if she comes to Princeton both Mrs. Stockton and I will take great pleasure in endeavouring to make the place agreeable to her and that I doubt not she will soon like America full as well as she does Scotland.

My respects to your worthy colleague Mr. Muir, to Mrs. Witherspoon, your daughter and other branches of your family.

I am Dr Sir

Your respectful friend & ob. Serv.

It turned out as Mr. Stockton had hoped. Mr. Blair, realizing that his youth—he was only twenty-seven—was regarded as a serious drawback to his efficiency, seized the obvious opportunity to avoid an awkward predicament, besides insuring his reputation for modesty and generosity, by sending forthwith to the trustees the declination on which he had already resolved. The situation being thus cleared, at the meeting of the board in December when Mr. Blair's letter was read and his declination accepted, Mr. Stockton produced the letters he had received from Scotland and informed his colleagues that if Dr. Witherspoon were re-elected he would esteem it "a duty to enter into this public service." The news was heard with "peculiar satisfaction" says the record. Dr. Witherspoon was promptly re-elected (De-

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ember 9) and Mr. William Peartree Smith was once more directed to transmit a copy of the vote of election, and to request Dr. Witherspoon to hasten his coming. A copy was also sent to Benjamin Rush for use in assisting the President-elect in the difficult task of cutting loose from Paisley.

The good news that Dr. Witherspoon was again a presidential possibility had spread rapidly and its effect we have already seen in Mr. Stockton's letter of November 5. The Reverend George Duffield told Mr. Beatty that "no sooner did the Letters arrive here from Scotland than Mrs. Witherspoon like another Sarah was willing to follow her husband, than Witherspoon's name dwelt upon every Tongue, and the very air of Princeton for Weeks together resounded with Nothing but the name of Witherspoon."²⁰ Rush had been keeping Dr. Witherspoon buoyed up until the news of his formal re-election should arrive. Already in December he was suggesting wealthy persons who might be disposed to give Dr. Witherspoon books for the college library; he explained away the election of young Mr. Blair and the circumstances of his declination.

"The College must have sunk into Disrepute wth. so young a man at the Head of it. But wt. could be done? better far to make choice of him than Dr. Allison. You see my dear Sir how Opportune, nay how indispensable your Offer was. Say has not the immediate Hand of Providence over-ruled this most important Event? The Hearts of the College were trembling with Fear when they saw the Object of their Hopes entrusted to the feeble Hands of an inexperienced Youth. But you have banished all their Fears, & they once more exult & triumph in the prospect of seeing their darling seminary the Bulwark of the Religion & Liberty of America; for my part I am transported every time I think of it:

Redeunt Saturnia Regna
Aspici et Omni Saeclo venturo laetentur²¹

Dr. Alison wrote a little later to Mr. Stiles:

Dr. Wetherspoon is expected at Princeton and great things to be

²⁰ Green MS. Rush to Witherspoon, April 30, 1768, quoting Mr. Duffield's to Mr. Beatty, which he had seen.

²¹ Green MS. Rush quotes the half line correctly (Vergil, *Eclogues* IV, 6) but the second line (*Eclogues*, IV, 52) should read "Aspice, venturo Laetentur ut omnia saeclo."

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done. The only want that they feel there is want of money. The trustees are bad Oeconomists and have squandered away much money and are not able to maintain a President and professors, and as they will not share the management with the Synod of Philadelphia I fear they will not have much help from that quarter, but all have high expectations from the Scots Doctor. I wish he may have skill to heal all our divisions.²²

That closing sentence makes amends for the somewhat ungracious tone of the rest of the paragraph. In fact the only dissenting note in the chorus of public approval seems to have been a half jocular remark by young William Paterson, the future Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, then a student of law at Princeton. He was writing to his chum John Macpherson, also a former Nassovian, and was attempting to be playful: "Witherspoon is President. Mercy on me! we shall be over-run with Scotchmen, the worst vermin under Heaven." And he later alludes to the new comer as "the Scotchman." But Paterson was partly Scotch himself, as was his correspondent; and elsewhere writing to the same friend he speaks of his filial affection for Scotland and his loss of patience when he hears people rail against it.²³

Dr. Witherspoon's letter accepting his election is no longer in existence. With characteristic energy he at once began to prepare himself for his new duties. Knowing that the grammar school at Nassau Hall, which had been discontinued shortly after President Finley's death, would be reorganized under his care and that, besides being considered a legitimate perquisite of the presidency it could be made a powerful feeder for the College and a model for colonial secondary education, he made use of a trip to London late the following February (1768) to visit eminent teachers and get hints as to methods and textbooks. His private memorandum book, seen by Ashbel Green, contained the notes of his itinerary, but Dr. Green does not quote from it and the book has disappeared. Remaining over two weeks he secured by purchase or gift large accessions to the college library and then paid a visit to Holland to form acquaintance with prominent men in the Dutch Church and to discuss a plan for sending to

²² Stiles MSS. Letter of June 4, 1768.

²³ Mills, *Glimpses of Colonial Society*, pp. 48, 88.

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Princeton a professor of divinity from Holland under whom Dutch candidates for the ministry in America might pursue their theological studies.²⁴

After a stay of two weeks in Holland, Dr. Witherspoon returned to Paisley in April and on the twelfth of that month at the meeting of the presbytery announced that he had received a call to America which he thought he would accept, and he, therefore, begged that a special meeting be called at which he might with due formality present his resignation. It will be remembered that his settlement at Paisley had been attended by extraordinary difficulty; the procedure in his leaving was to be no less complicated. In fact, the path of a minister entering or leaving any Scottish parish in those days seems to have been strewn with as many formal obstructions as could possibly be imagined.

May 10, at Paisley, Dr. Witherspoon read the following letter addressed to the moderator of the presbytery:²⁵

Rev. Sir:

It is not unknown to the members of this Presbytery that I have received a Call to the College of New Jersey in America. This after much deliberation I have come to a resolution of accepting of. The reasons inducing me to this is unnecessary to trouble the Presbytery with: it is sufficient to say that no dissatisfaction either with the Church of Scotland or my present Charge has in the least contributed to it. On the contrary I part with all my connections in Scotland with

²⁴ In 1766 a plan had been laid before the trustees of the College looking toward this end but the board came to the conclusion that the time was not ripe for such a professorship and had tabled the proposal. Soon after, the Classis of Amsterdam had suggested to the two parties in the Dutch Church in America that they bury their differences, give up for the present the effort to organize a separate college, and unite in procuring from Holland a professor of divinity who should be located at Princeton by courtesy of the College of New Jersey and who should perhaps give courses in the College. This seems to have been the reason for Witherspoon's visit to Holland. At Rotterdam he was in frequent conference with John H. Livingston, the future well-known divine who at this period was a student of theology at Utrecht. The plan came to naught as the American churches objected to a local union with Princeton and a few years later a charter was obtained for Queens, now Rutgers, College. The history of these developments is found in Alexander Gunn's *Memoirs of J. H. Livingston*, in Corwin's *Manual of the Reformed Church in America*, 4th edition, p. 119, and in the history of the founding of Queens (Rutgers) College. The accounts of Jonathan Sergeant, treasurer of the College of New Jersey, show that the institution paid Dr. Witherspoon's expenses for the trip.

²⁵ Presbytery of Paisley MS. records, May 10, 1768.

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the greatest Reluctance and shall ever retain a grateful sense of the obligations I ly under to my Brethren in the Ministry in this Presbytery and elsewhere as well as to a very affectionate Congregation the care of which I am now to surrender. I do therefore hereby demit my Charge in this place hoping the presbytery will receive it and Conceive their Sentence in such terms as it may plainly appear to be of the nature of a Translation and that I depart in full Communion with the Church of Scotland.

I am Rev. Sir your Affec^e Brother and obedient
humble servant

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After Dr. Witherspoon had addressed the presbytery on the subject, Benjamin Rush was introduced to lay before the meeting the minute of the trustees of the College of New Jersey which had been sent to him, dated December 9, 1767, showing that Dr. Witherspoon had been unanimously elected President of the college. Rush having withdrawn, a minute dated May 9, 1768, was then read from the magistrates and town council of Paisley.²⁶

The Magistrates & Council being informed that the Reverend Mr. Witherspoon minister of the Laigh Church in this place is to give his Demission to the Presbytery of Paisley tomorrow the tenth day of May seventeen hundred and sixty eight years, Do hereby appoint Baillie John Storie & Baillie John Sclater two of their number in their name to attend the Presbytery and signify to them that though they have Lived in the Greatest harmony with Him since he was their minister and Could have wished that he had Continued in his present Charge, Yet since he has seen it his duty to Accept of another Office from Respect and friendship for him they Resolve to give no opposition But are willing that the Presbytery accept to his Demission.

JOHN STORIE
JOHN SCLATER

A committee of elders from the kirk session then appeared and presented the following extract from the session minutes dated May 10, 1768:²⁷

At Dr. Witherspoon's desire the Moderator represented that after mature deliberation he had been prevailed upon to accept of a call

²⁶ Paisley Council MS. records.

²⁷ Presbytery of Paisley MS. records.

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from the College of New Jersey in North America and that he intended to give in his demission of his pastoral Charge to the presbytery of Paisley to meet this day. But as the time fixed for his departure would not admit of delay he desired that the Session would appoint a deputation of their number to wait on the Presbytery and in their name express their assent to the acceptance of his demission. The session having considered the above requisition nominated and appointed [names left blank] to wait on Presbytery and in their name represent that though they have always had reason to esteem Dr. Witherspoon very highly in love for his own and his works sake and feel the strongest reluctance at the dissolution of his pastoral relation to them yet since he hath seen it his duty to accept of the call to New Jersey and expresseth a desire that the Revd Presbytery may accept of the demission he proposes to exhibit, they are determined to make no opposition but to acquiesce in what deliverance the Presbytery shall be pleased to give on the Cause.

Robert Burns was not yet born, but Dr. Witherspoon was already quite familiar with the spirit of his future countryman's famous line concerning the plans of mice and men. He did not doubt that he was called to America under Providence and he had accepted the call in that spirit; but at the same time he could not avoid the fear that, as this is at best an uncertain world, something might happen to necessitate a change in his plans even at the eleventh hour and he had no intention to fall, providentially or otherwise, between the two stools of the Princeton presidency and the Paisley pastorate. With excusable prudence, therefore, he asked to be heard again in his own behalf, and then requested Presbytery to consider his demission under the restriction that his ministry should not cease until the date of his actual departure from Scotland, lest any unforeseen circumstance prevent him at the last moment; and that in the meantime he be given leave to depart in case the ship on which he proposed to take passage should sail between then and the June meeting of the presbytery. This was granted by unanimous consent, and it was also voted that upon any person appearing at Presbytery with a written letter from him asking final acceptance of his resignation, or on receipt of authentic evidence of his having sailed, Presbytery would accept the same and find the pastoral relation

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with Paisley dissolved from that date. And in the event of his departing thus

The Presbytery Did and hereby Do Recommend him as a minister in full Communion with the Church of Scotland whose character and Conduct Justly Intitle him to all due respect and encouragement from the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and their other Brethren in America who have the esteem of and are friendly to the constitution of this Church.²⁸

The opinion has been expressed ²⁹ that Dr. Witherspoon left Paisley a persecuted and disappointed man. But the documentary evidence in the case is quite to the contrary. The resolutions, letters, and other records connected with his call to Dundee, with his money presents and increases of salary at Paisley, and finally with his departure for America, admit of only one view of his place in the affection and esteem of his parishioners and of his own feelings toward the community and his position in the church at large. And his words in his first sermon at Princeton and in subsequent letters home show beyond possible doubt that he was speaking with perfect candor when he assured his colleagues of the Presbytery of Paisley in his letter of May 9, 1768, that he was not leaving Scotland on account of any dissatisfaction. As for his alleged sacrifice of valuable estates on leaving Scotland, as alleged by Graham and others, it yet remains to be proved that he ever owned or was likely to own any. There are indications that he had rich relatives, and Ashbel Green reports the rumor that one of these offered Dr. Witherspoon a large sum to remain in Scotland; but no facts have come to light in support of this rumor.

Already on April 16, the Sunday after he had announced to the Presbytery his forthcoming departure, Dr. Witherspoon had preached the first installment of his farewell sermon, *Ministerial*

²⁸ Presbytery of Paisley MS. records.

²⁹ For example, Hew Scott, *Fasti*, vol. II, part I, p. 203, says he was "sour and embittered;" James Peterson, *History of the Counties of Ayr and Wigton*, vol. III, part I, p. 67, says that Paisley became "too hot" for him; James Graham, *Social Life in Scotland*, vol. II, p. 444, says that "harassed by long persecution . . . he sacrificed valuable estates and left Scotland in disgust," and Dr. McCosh in his *Scottish Philosophy* follows in general these opinions.

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Fidelity.³⁰ On May 15 he delivered the remainder, and the next day after reading the last proofs of his volume of *Discourses* and dating the Introduction, he and his family left Paisley for Greenock, the port of Glasgow, where the brigantine *Peggy*, a fine stout vessel "well found with good accommodations," according to the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and commanded by Captain Robert Spier, was riding at anchor in the Clyde. With delightfully unconscious humor the *Edinburgh Caledonian Mercury* of the following Saturday sapiently informed its readers that

On Monday last the Reverend Mr. John Witherspoon a late minister in Paisley, set out for Greenock to take upon him the office of President of the College of that place.

On the eighteenth, as the ship was going down the river, Dr. Witherspoon wrote the following to the moderator of the presbytery by whom it was introduced at the June meeting:³¹

From on board the *Peggy* in
Greenock road, May 18, 1768.

My dear Brother

We are Just getting under Sail therefore please to intimate this to the Presbytery at their next Meeting According to the Tenor of their Minute and tell them I am sensible of their Civility and Kindness in the manner of expressing their Sentence and hope they will now without delay find the Vacancy that Steps may be taken for its supply. I shall remember you daily before God. I expect the same from you and that you will give orders as to the publick prayers the first Lords Day in your own church and the first day there is Sermon in the Laigh Church after that let any Minister do as he pleases. Let Brother Alice know I think of him and all other friends.

I am Dear Sir your affecⁿ. Brother &c

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Baillie Storie of the Council then appeared and prayed the Presbytery to accept the demission and declare a vacancy ac-

³⁰The memoir published in the *Christian Instructor* for October, 1829, states that this sermon was published in separate form for Dr. Witherspoon's parishioners; but no such copy has been found. The earliest edition seen by the present writer is in the *Discourses on Practical Subjects* published at Glasgow in 1768; the sermon is also in the *Practical Discourses* published at Edinburgh in the same year.

³¹Presbytery of Paisley MS. records.

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ording to previous resolution, which was done. And thus at last ended John Witherspoon's official connection with the Church of Scotland.

During the monotonous weeks that succeeded each other after the purple hills of Ireland had faded below the horizon, Dr. Witherspoon must have spent many hours musing over the step he had taken. Its seriousness he had well weighed during the past two years, and when he finally accepted his call he did so only with grave misgivings as to his fitness for his new task, misgivings which even the extravagant joy of Benjamin Rush had not dispelled. In the last letter he received from this enthusiast before sailing, the latter reminded him of Young's line: "'Tis impious in a good man to be sad," and pointed out that "a uniform Cheerfulness of Temper" would at the present juncture throw lustre on everything he did in entering upon his charge at Princeton. There is sufficient hint here of the state of Dr. Witherspoon's feelings when the final wrench came, on leaving Scotland.

Difficult enough as such a step would be in these days of space and time annihilation, a hundred and fifty years ago it was one before which a stouter heart than his might well have quailed. Not only was he leaving his native land and lifelong associations, but he was casting over a devoted charge upon which he exerted an ever-widening influence, and he was deserting ecclesiastical circles wherein he had won enviable reputation. His interest in America to be sure was no new thing; he had long looked upon that country as the solution of Scotland's pauper problem and he was soon to acquire land in the New World with the intention of encouraging Scottish emigration. But he was not going to America either as a landowner nor as a promoter, although we shall hear more of his property later. Nor could financial reasons have swayed him, for in purchasing power the Princeton salary was not much larger than the one he was receiving at Paisley, and in any case it seemed altogether probable that he would have been offered better livings than Paisley had he remained in Great Britain; the Dundee and Dublin calls were already instances. Nor had he found his labors irksome nor his associations unpleasant. He was deeply attached to his parish and never ceased to think of his people kindly and to regret the breaking of pas-

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toral relations with them. His people loved and honored him. The frictions he had encountered in his gusty career were scarcely other than those any virile character might reasonably have expected to meet. Like other men of vigorous temperament he had made his mistakes and had suffered for them. As for the rest, he had rather enjoyed the give and take.

So that he seemed to have had everything to lose and very little or nothing to gain by exchanging his Paisley charge for the precarious headship of an educational establishment of dubious permanency with a quarreling clientele, and in a distant colony. He had no experience in administration of that sort unless we except what he had gathered as a clerical visitor at Scottish parochial schools, and with the best of intentions this could scarcely prove of much assistance in directing the fortunes of an American college. For that matter, if he wished to teach there was ample opportunity to begin at home, where in a Highland parish of his day not more than three persons on an average could read or write.³²

As for the college to which he was going, until his first election to its presidency whatever knowledge he had of it was derived entirely from secondary sources. He was of course aware of the collections taken up for the College by the Reverends Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Davies some fourteen years before, and he may have seen the meagre account of the institution which they distributed along their way, as rare a pamphlet now as it was meagre then; but there is no indication that he met the oddly mated pair from Princeton. In the reports of the Society in Scotland for Propagating the Gospel which were in his library he had come across allusions to the work of the College in educating Indian students; his copy of the *Official Narrative* of the Indian Charity School conducted at Lebanon, Connecticut, may have given him further light on this subject; and he had surely heard of the visit to Great Britain paid by a young Princetonian, the Reverend Nathaniel Whitaker, in company with that good Indian, though alive, Samson Occom. He owned a copy of Jonathan Edwards' *Remarks on John Home's Essays on the Principles of*

³²Graham, *Social Life in Scotland*, vol. II, p. 157. Even as late as 1821, it is said, half the population of 400,000 could not read.

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Morality and Natural Religion; he possessed Edwards' *Life of David Brainerd*; and he had subscribed for a copy, "on fine paper, not coarse," of Edwards' *Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, so that he knew something of at least one of his predecessors; and finally Blair's *Account of the College of New Jersey*, the only satisfactory sketch of the institution yet printed, had been sent to him on his election. But it seems altogether probable that until Mr. Stockton and Benjamin Rush visited him he had never talked with anyone who knew the college from personal experience as student or officer—it will be remembered that Stockton found he had "no tolerable" notion of the place. According to Ashbel Green, George Whitefield, who was thoroughly familiar with the earlier history of the college, wrote to Witherspoon urging him to accept the call to Princeton, telling him that in a new country like America "every gowmsman was a legion in the cause of religion," but there is no evidence that they ever met, and Whitefield's letter does not seem to have been preserved.³³

To a Scottish Presbyterian of his antecedents and training there was in the Princeton call one attraction clearly paramount. From the letters quoted it is obvious that the emissaries of the College of New Jersey had pleaded the missionary phase of the enterprise they laid before him and had placed the gain to American Presbyterianism and the cause of religion by the side, if not actually in front, of the gain to American education. As we have seen, there was very little said about education. Dr. Rodgers for example, in the close of his midnight letter of Christmas Eve, 1766, had said that Witherspoon's coming would enable the trustees to enlarge the course of study by erecting additional professorships, this to be effected when the President's chair was filled; but the emphasis in the letter is distinctly laid on the fact that the eyes of Presbyterian churches in seven provinces looked to Princeton alone to supply their pulpits; the President would have the power not only to serve the Church as a whole in the widest and most efficient way by training its ministry, but would also be the revered head of Presbyterian interests in the Middle Colonies, a thought echoed by the irrepressible Benjamin Rush in a phrase more vigorous than Presbyterian,

³³ Ashbel Green, *Autobiography*, p. 336.

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when by way of illustration he told the Doctor that President Davies of Princeton had been as it were "a bishop among the Churches."³⁴

The College was described as a school of prophets, and although it was absolutely unsectarian in charter it was evidently strongly Presbyterian in tone. American Presbyterianism seemed in no small danger of disintegration; the existence of the College itself was threatened; the influence that such an institution might develop in supplying the ministry with consecrated men, educated and trained along the same line, and the insistence of its friends, coupled with Witherspoon's own half-timid conviction that he was the man to save the institution and probably the Church from being shattered by faction, constituted, unless one is very much mistaken, the imperious note in this cry from Macedonia to which he knew not how to turn a deaf ear.

Lurking in his mind, moreover, however little others may have thought of it or he himself have realized just then, was the belief that the function of such a college was not merely to educate candidates for the ministry, but also to send out into the widening spheres of colonial life Christian gentlemen and scholarly men of affairs. Stockton, Rush, and Beatty must have so depicted its possibilities in spite of its reverses, and so described educational conditions in the Middle Colonies, with Princeton in the strategic position halfway between New York and Philadelphia where both colleges were under Anglican influence, and halfway between William and Mary in the south and Harvard and Yale in New England, that he could not have failed to see the beckoning of half-veiled opportunity for a strong man of brains, common sense, and energy, to mould the lives of some of the best youth that this new country was producing. Dr. Rodgers had referred to this, while Rush with Edinburgh University in mind had pointed out that there were many modern ideas that Witherspoon might introduce into the College inasmuch as the trustees, according to his estimate, were mostly "very contracted in their Notions of Education, & want a man of Spirit to give them more extensive Views to all their Schemes."³⁵ Events were

³⁴Green MS. Letter of March 25, 1767.

³⁵Green MS. Letter of December 29, 1767.

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to show that thanks to Dr. Witherspoon's influence in unexpected colonial developments this particular "school of prophets" was to become for a brief but brilliant hour a school of very practical politics, and to be quite as notable for the men it graduated, able and eager to take their place as leaders in secular affairs, as for the ministers of the gospel who listened within its walls to their first lectures in divinity. It was not Dr. Witherspoon's fault but his good fortune that he soon found himself making more men of affairs than men of the cloth; and it was a regrettable day for Princeton when she let go the advantage he then gave her.

Nevertheless if we seek in a single phrase of his own the one dominant reason for his coming to America we may find it in the closing paragraph of his first Princeton sermon. One would not guess that this discourse is the maiden utterance of the new President of an institution of learning. The headship of the College carried with it the pastorate of the Princeton village church and it is scarcely the eager master mind seizing a splendid chance for achievement, it is not the President, but the modest, and almost timid, pastor, who is speaking:

I make no merit at all, of having left country, and kindred, and connections of the dearest kind, in order to serve the interest of the Church of Christ in this part of the globe; for I consider with pleasure the oneness of his body, and the extent of the Catholic Church. . . . But when I consider the respect and affection so much above my desert, that have been shown to me since my arrival in this place, and the testimonies of joy and satisfaction which have been given by all ranks I am filled with the greatest concern because it plainly implies an expectation of duty and service from me, which I fear I shall be ill able to perform. . . . Pray that an all sufficient God may give strength from above, and pour down his blessing on the public institution in this place. . . . Pray that success may attend the ministry of the gospel in this place; and that if it please God the esteem and affection shown me by all to whom I stand now related may not be less than it is, for I have not the least reason to desire, nor indeed the courage to hope, that it can possibly be greater.³⁶

The grip of the past was still strong upon him, and therefore, it was still as the pastor that he ended his sermon with one brief additional sentence:

³⁶*Works*, vol. II, p. 531.

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And once more pray that my beloved charge whom I left in Scotland, and will never forget, may by the special conduct of divine providence be supplied with a faithful pastor, who may feed them with knowledge and understanding.

—a poignant sentence full of a very human touch of regret as it casts back for a single wistful moment to the crowded church across the sea, where every Sabbath twelve to fifteen hundred persons sat dutifully at his feet, in contrast with the “thin and negligent” congregation of college boys and colonial villagers he was that day addressing for the first time.³⁷

³⁷ It was in these terms that Dr. Witherspoon, in his introductory lecture on divinity, reverted to his feelings on his first appearance before a Princeton audience. (*Works*, vol. IV, p. 10).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN

ON Sunday, August 7, 1768, the gallant *Peggy* reached her moorings at Philadelphia after a tedious voyage of twelve weeks. She had been reported in the river the day before and several gentlemen had gone down to welcome her distinguished passenger. The flutter of excitement that marked his landing on American shores was not unnatural. The general public was familiar with the somewhat sensational circumstances of his two elections, and the newspapers had widely spread the news of his coming. By thoughtful persons for whom the progress of higher education in New Jersey and in the Colonies at large held any concern, the experiment of importing a foreigner for an American educational executive position would be watched with the utmost interest; while for those to whom the cause of religion, and especially of Presbyterianism and religious freedom, was the principal concern, his coming was fraught with the most far-reaching possibilities. The Bradfords of Philadelphia had published a new edition of his celebrated *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*,—and had done their share to fan Presbyterian interest. The opinion prevailed that if he proved to be the man of the hour his presence would indeed mean not only an end to the feud between the two factions in the Church and their guidance into the way of peace, but also the probable reorganization of the Church along better administrative lines and the creation of a unified front wherewith to face the struggle for existence. It was not strange, therefore, that before he was fairly ashore, the President found himself the cause of a good natured rivalry whose object was to secure him as guest for the few days he and his family were to spend in Philadelphia recovering from the effects of three months' confinement in the cramped quarters of a little ship. Mr. Andrew Hodge, the prominent merchant, was the lucky host, and for the best part of the next week his house was the Mecca of all ranks and persuasions coming partly to pay their respects to a divine of such repute, and partly it must be suspected to get

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a glimpse of this stranger who had quit his native land for the presidency of the College of New Jersey.¹

They saw a heavily built man of medium stature, a man in the full power of his forty-six years. His blue eyes, under strikingly thick brows, immediately caught attention—they were the clear, quick-kindling eyes of an active mentality; his hair was brown, his complexion fair; the cheekbones were high, the mouth mobile, the nose and ears noticeably large; his face, grave in repose but lit by gleams of humor when he talked, was strongly modelled and somewhat heavy, but not stern or severe; character was stamped in every feature. He had that indefinable quality called presence. His voice was disappointing and he spoke with a very marked Scottish accent, but one listened to him inevitably, confident that here was a man who did not speak save when he had something worth saying. With him were his wife, a gentle looking woman of forty-eight, and five children, Ann, the oldest, now in her twentieth year, James, a stripling of seventeen who had already been four years a student at the University of Glasgow, John, who had just passed his eleventh birthday, Frances, just reaching her ninth, and David the youngest, his father's pet, a precocious and lovable boy of eight. Two other daughters and three sons he had left sleeping in the low-walled churchyards of Beith and Paisley.

On the twelfth the Witherspoons set out for Princeton. At Trenton the party was met by a number of ladies and gentlemen and by trustees of the College, living in the neighborhood. At the old province-line, a mile or so from Princeton, the undergraduates, and the faculty consisting of Vice-president William Tennent, and the three tutors Joseph Periam, James Thomson, and Jonathan Edwards, Jr., were awaiting their new head. When the triumphal procession reached Princeton, the President's House on the campus not being ready Mr. Richard Stockton threw open his hospitable doors and entertained the new-comers at "Morven," his stately ancestral home, which with its spacious apartments and cool wide halls, its formal gardens and its wealth of trees and lawn must have been a glad relief after the heat of Philadelphia, as well as a revelation to a family that hitherto had

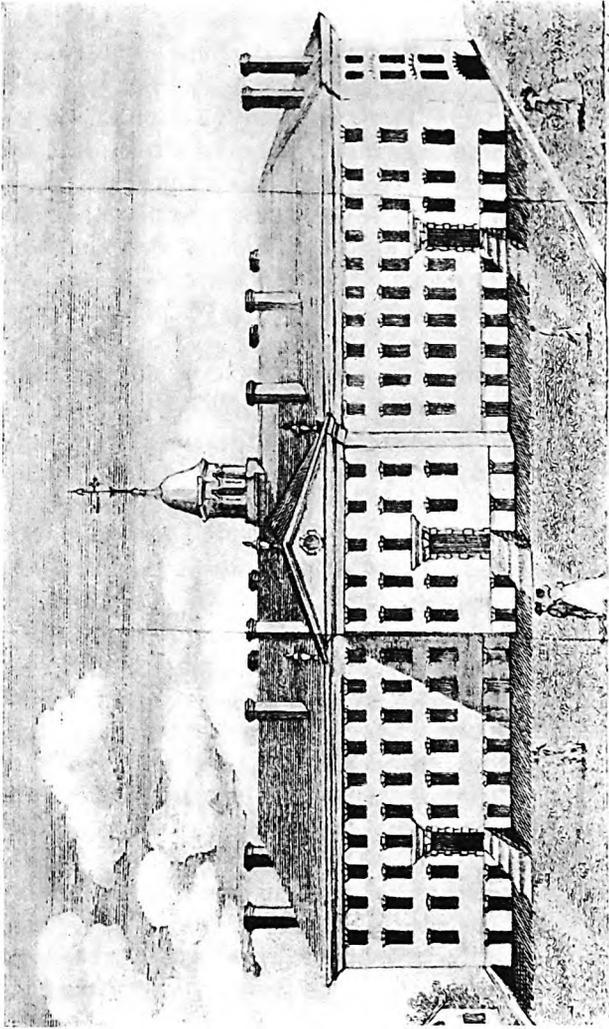
¹ *Scots Magazine*, October, 1768.

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dwelt in a humble Scottish manse. And that night the undergraduates, only too ready to celebrate, illuminated Nassau Hall with tallow dips in every window, while the village (and indeed the whole countryside) united in an effort to emphasize the welcome. The glow of those simple lights could be seen for miles—Princeton is set on a ridge, and the trees that veil her now were not yet planted, so that Nassau Hall was a landmark against the sky. The lights denoted the beginning of a new era in the annals of the College; and, more important still, they marked the advent of a new force into the history of the province and of the American people. Dr. Witherspoon was as much surprised and pleased as he was touched by the enthusiasm of his reception. Its very fervor was almost pathetic. Things were not done so at home where men were less close to nature, less frank of their feelings; and if he had any remaining doubts as to the sincerity of his call or as to the wisdom of his acceptance they must have been swept away by the enthusiastic greeting he received on every side. The words of his first sermon show how deeply he was stirred. He realized now that the bounds of his influence were not to be the walls of Nassau Hall but that he held their setting within his own hands; and he faced his new associations confident that he would not fail.

On August 17 at a special meeting of the board of trustees he took the oaths of office; there was no public inaugural ceremony.² During the few days between his arrival and his inauguration he had had ample opportunity to look over the College and its environment. He had found the village consisting of perhaps some fifty houses clustered along the high road, most of them modest enough though set amid ample orchards and gardens. On the outskirts of the village were three or four homes of more substantial style belonging to older and richer families. It was a sunny, healthy spot; and lacking urban distractions and temptations (save as they were echoed at the few but excellent taverns that catered to the wants of travellers or met the accustomed

² Ashbel Green, *Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. IV, p. 467, was mistaken in his address to the Princeton Alumni Association in 1840 on Witherspoon's administration, when he said that the President delivered an inaugural when he was inducted into office. He delivered it at commencement, a month later.



View of Nassau Hall, Princeton.

From the Engraving by Amos Doolittle

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needs of genial villagers), it seemed to him an admirable locality for an institution such as he believed the College of New Jersey should be—not a quiet, comfortable, dreaming place, but a training school wherein to prepare men's hearts and minds to meet the clash and challenge of the world. Lying on the border between two counties of the province, the village was gaining importance as the common meeting ground of both; and the President learned that during the ten years the College had been here, its presence had brought to the village growing interest and reputation.

In the *Account of the College of New Jersey*, he had read what may be called the official description of the College, and from the frontispiece drawn by the versatile Vice-president, the Reverend William Tennent, and engraved by Dawkins, he had obtained a fair notion of the appearance of its buildings. He was not surprised, therefore, to find them better looking than anything at the University of Edinburgh. Nassau Hall, the finest edifice in the province, was a severely plain stone edifice 176 feet long and 54 deep, consisting of a basement and three stories, surmounted by a low belfry,³ and situated in an unfenced plot of ground some four and a half acres in extent facing north on the highroad—the fence so carefully drawn in the Dawkins plate was only the artist's "embellishment." The building itself was just ten years old and still bore the garish look of newness. The yard in front of it—or campus, as it was first called in Witherspoon's time, was bare save for a row of young buttonwoods, recently planted along its northern boundary. It would be difficult for modern Princetonians to imagine this space without its arching elms, its cool deepshade, and its close cropped turf; but in 1768 it was still a veritable "yard." The President's House stood at the northwest corner of the lot; east of Nassau Hall was a kitchen building and steward's house, and south of it were the college outhouse and a shed in which were kept the fire-engine and leather buckets. Counting three students to a room, the building was estimated to accommodate one hundred and forty-seven. The forty-nine rooms or suites consisted of a central study some

*The present cupola dates from the restoration after the fire of 1855.

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twenty feet square, with two large closets for bedrooms, each containing a window. On the north front of the building there were three entrances, each approached by a low flight of steps leading into the first floor; two of these were duplicated on the southern side of the building. Over the main front entrance was a bust of Homer, the only external adornment the building had. Passing through this entrance one crossed the long hall that pierced the building from end to end and came into the prayer-hall or chapel, cool in summer but cold as a tomb in winter, the largest apartment in the building, being about forty feet square with a low gallery on the western side containing the organ, "small tho' exceeding good" as the official account hath it, and according to Dr. Ezra Stiles of New Haven the first to be used in any American Presbyterian house of worship. Opposite the gallery was the rostrum used by college declaimers on weekdays, and on which stood the high pulpit, where prayers were offered every morning and evening and sermons delivered on Sundays. Over the rostrum was a life-size portrait of His Majesty King George II; above the gallery, and surmounted by his carved and gilded coat of arms, hung a picture of Jonathan Belcher, late Governor of the Province and patron of the College. A series of small portraits of British sovereigns completed the decoration of the hall. Above the main entrance on the second floor was the library whose contents in 1764 numbered only 1200 volumes, but which by 1768 probably approached 1500, thanks to the acquisitions brought over by Dr. Witherspoon. In the basement were recitation rooms, and a dining-room large enough to hold faculty, students and grammar scholars. The building was lighted by candles and heated by woodfires. Water was obtained from two good wells behind Nassau Hall.

Under President Finley the curriculum of the grammar school had consisted chiefly of the elements of Latin and Greek, arithmetic, penmanship, reading, and declamation. The twenty-two "Rules and Orders to be observed by all the Members of the Grammar School at Nassau Hall" had long ago been printed as an appendix to the *Complete Introduction of the Latin Tongue* . . . "published principally for the use of the Grammar School

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at Nassau Hall,"⁴ and many of the requirements in matters of conduct applied to undergraduates. Graduation from the grammar school carried with it admission to the College without further test.

As for the College, the entrance requirements dated from 1748 and consisted of proficiency in reading, writing, spelling, and English composition, a knowledge of the rules of simple arithmetic (added in 1760), ability to write Latin prose, to translate Vergil, Cicero, and the Greek gospels, and a commensurate acquaintance with Latin and Greek grammar.

The curriculum in College was what might have been expected of such foundations and entrance requirements. Freshman year was spent in Latin and Greek—Horace, Cicero, Greek Testament, Lucian and Xenophon. In sophomore year the classics were continued and geography, rhetoric, logic, and higher mathematics, were begun. Juniors continued mathematical studies and went through a course in natural and moral philosophy, metaphysics and chronology, and those who expected to enter the ministry began Hebrew. Senior year was devoted to a review of the classics, arts, and sciences, and to composition; and in a course, which seems to have been one of criticism and which was usually given by the President, the graduating class re-read Homer, Horace, and Longinus, with comments on aesthetic points by the professor. A weekly course in disputation begun in junior year was continued, and on Sundays Seniors delivered public disputations on religious subjects. Once a month was "oration day"—an institution which, later known for obvious reasons as "chapel stage," died a lingering death in the last decade of the nineteenth century—when Seniors delivered harangues of their own composition. Every evening, except on Saturday and Sunday, the members of the three lower classes pronounced declamations or delivered selections from the great classical orators or from the English poets.

⁴The Princeton copy is the second edition, published at Woodbridge, N. J., in 1760. A facsimile of the titlepage, with the rules themselves, was published in an edition of one hundred copies by C. L. Traver at Trenton, N. J., in 1893. No reprint seems to have been issued during Witherspoon's time.

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The rising bell rang at five and morning prayers were said at five-thirty, when a Senior usually read a chapter of the Bible from the original into English, after which the President proposed a few questions on the reading and then commented at large. Between morning chapel and breakfast, which was served at eight, came an hour's study. Recitations began at nine and lasted until one, the dinner hour. From three until five, when the bell rang for vespers, were study hours. Evening prayer was introduced by what contemporary terminology called "psalmody," but in spite of the assistance of the organ and official assurance that care was taken "to improve the youth in the art of sacred music," and notwithstanding the inspiration that should have been derived from the memory of James Lyon, who prepared his early American hymn-book *Urania* while an undergraduate in Nassau Hall and whose compositions were used at commencement, the youth in question do not seem to have made much musical progress. After vespers they were free again until seven when supper was served; and at nine the curfew called every one back to his room. Of spare time there was little; of athletics none. The high purpose of a college education in those sterner days precluded reference to sports in the accounts of college life; in fact the records, official or private, antedating the Revolution, mention this frivolous subject only once. But the tacit official disapproval of sports did not deter students from working off superfluous energy in childish pranks which were the contemporary substitutes for better forms of exercise, and of which an instructive catalogue has been left to curious posterity by Philip Vickers Fithian of the Class of 1772.⁵

The board supplied in the college refectory was theoretically as good as the neighborhood afforded, an official claim of which the truth was never proved to the satisfaction of the boarders. Most of the insurrections in the College then and thereafter had their root in the refectory. Tea and coffee were served at breakfast, and dinner, so we are gravely informed, saw every variety of meat and fish that could be obtained—and "sometimes pyes." Cider and small beer were the customary drink at dinner, milk and chocolate taking their place at supper; and after vespers any

⁵ *Journal and Letters*, p. 256.

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undergraduate might, if he cared to, "brew himself a dish of tea" in his room—an official permit belonging of course to pre-Revolutionary days. The total cost per annum approximated twenty-five pounds, six shillings, made up of the following items: tuition, four pounds, board and service, fifteen pounds, room-rent one pound, washing three pounds, wood and candles two pounds, sundries six shillings.

With many of the students looking forward to the ministry, it was to be expected that the formal religious tone of the College should be remarked. Attendance at chapel was compulsory, especially on Sundays when the students listened to two sermons, one in the morning at the Presbyterian Church and another in the middle of the afternoon at the college chapel. Early morning prayers were said in chapel on Sundays as on other days, and at the same hour. Not content with this, a religious society, composed of any who cared to join, held meetings on Sunday evenings where the program consisted of prayers and hymns and the reading of a sermon by a tutor. In addition each class had its prayer meeting.

Thanks to the care of Mr. Tennent, who had been Acting President since Dr. Finley's incapacitation, Dr. Witherspoon found things less disorganized than might have been expected, but he plunged into his work with an energy as startling as it was successful. Such energy had no precedent in the history of the College and was to remain unparalleled until another Scotsman, exactly a century later, came to occupy the presidential chair.⁶

Beginning with fundamentals the President at once took hold of the grammar school. It will be remembered that he had made an effort in Great Britain to get advice in regard to the conduct of such a school. The hints he obtained during this brief course in

⁶It cannot be out of place here to refer once more to the curious parallelisms that mark the lives of Dr. Witherspoon and Dr. McCosh, first pointed out by Dean West and repeated in the writer's sketch of the history of Princeton (New York, 1914). Both were by birth Lowland Scotsmen, and students at the University of Edinburgh; ministers of the Scottish Church at important crises, one heading the opposition to the Moderates, the other aiding in the establishment of the Free Church; both coming to America, Witherspoon in August, 1768, McCosh in August, 1868, to do as Presidents of Princeton perhaps their greatest work; both living the last twenty-six years of their lives in Princeton, the one dying November 15, 1794, the other November 16, 1894. Academic history has seldom repeated itself so completely.

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pedagogics, miscellaneous though they must have been, were so well ordered in his mind and what he called his "scheme" was so well thought out, that within one week after his inauguration he had completed his plans, obtained the sanction of the trustees, chosen a member of the senior class, William Churchill Houston, as master, and published an advertisement in the papers stating that the school would open in November, on the day the college winter term began. Improvements were already announced; he had procured a "Terrestrial Globe" so that the scholars might learn geography "at some Hours of Leisure"—it had hitherto been taught in sophomore year in the College; writing and arithmetic would be taught daily; cheap lodgings had been arranged in the village and the pupils could board in the college refectory.⁷

As for the curriculum of the College, that was a matter not to be meddled with hastily, and for the present Dr. Witherspoon

⁷The announcement, (*N. J. Archives*, 1 ser., vol. XXVI, p. 269,) is dated Princeton, August 25, 1768, and reads as follows:

The Trustees of the College of New Jersey, give Notice to the Public, That whereas the Grammar School which used to be kept under the Direction of the President as a Nursery for the College has been discontinued for some Time, on Account of the long Vacancy of that Office, That the Chair being now filled by the Arrival of the Gentleman last chosen from North-Britain; The School is to be opened under his Direction, precisely on the 7th Day of November next, being the Beginning of the Winter Term in College. The PRESIDENT, has already provided a Person to teach it; and has undertaken to the Trustees to lay down a Plan of proceeding to the Teacher, to have it under his constant Inspection; and take Care that it be conducted on the very best Principles. This he hopes to be able to do with the greater Success, for that, being acquainted, before he left Home, that such a Thing would be expected from him, he took Care to perfect his Scheme, by conversing with some of the most eminent and approved Teachers in Great-Britain. Parents are desired to take Notice, that their Children being properly founded in the Languages, is of the utmost Importance to their Subsequent Studies in College being easy, pleasant, and successful. Several reputable Householders in Princeton, have engaged to the Trustees, to take Boarders at as cheap a Rate, it is presumed, as in any Town in this Province, where a public Grammar School is taught: And if the Parents of any of the Children should decline to have them boarded in the College, the Trustees have consented to their being taken in and supplied as the Scholars are. There is a Terrestrial Globe provided for the School, that they may be taught Geography at some Hours of Leisure; they will also have an Hour each Day appropriated to Writing and Arithmetick without any additional Expense, which it is of Importance that they learn early. This Notice is given so long before the Time of opening School, that Parents may have their Children there seasonably; and it is particularly desired that such as have Children to begin the Latin, would send them, if possible, upon the very Day above mentioned; that they may neither suffer any Loss themselves, nor be the Means of retarding others.

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made no changes. But within a few weeks of his arrival at Princeton he did announce a reduction of college expenses. The idea had gained credence that an education at Princeton, besides being the luxury that a college education anywhere was in those days, was unnecessarily costly, and in order to wipe out the grounds of this charge, the President had devised a new plan. The high charge for board was due to the remissness of parents and guardians in paying students' college bills; the steward had to buy on credit at advanced prices. Now, in order to enable him to pay cash and thus secure more reasonable rates it was proposed to require part payment of college fees in advance, a simple expedient which apparently had not occurred previously to the financiers of the College. According to the new plan board would cost six shillings and sixpence New Jersey proclamation money per week; each student on admission would deposit with the steward seven pounds in advance for board and at commencement or at the beginning of the following term would be required to pay up all his arrears in tuition fees and room-rent, or cease his connection with the College. The total expenses per year were thus calculated to amount to twenty-three pounds thirteen shillings, or one pound seven shillings less than in Dr. Finley's time. The announcement stated that:

Upon the Plan above adopted the Expence of living here, will be within a few Shillings, more or less, as follows;

To 1 Year's Board (deducting the Vacation Weeks at Spring and Fall) at 6s. 6d. per Week	£ 13.13. 0
Fire Wood and Candles, about	2.10. 0
Washing, about,	2.10. 0
Tuition and Chamber Rent	5.00. 0
	<hr/>
	£ 23.13. 0

Every student to pay one Shilling per Week, for every Week's Absence after the Vacations are ended, to indemnify the Steward, who pays Wages to Servants for their Benefit.

Of far greater significance, not only from the viewpoint of American educational history but also from that of Dr. Witherspoon's own conception of his task and opportunity, though of less immediately apparent importance, was the announcement,



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made at the same time, of the arrangement of graduate courses for those who wished to continue their studies, whether for the learned professions or merely to acquire such liberal accomplishments in general which in the pertinent phrase of the advertisement, "fit young Gentlemen for serving their Country in public Stations." In this Dr. Witherspoon was re-asserting one of the two principal aims of the founders of the College and one which was in danger of being lost sight of in the demand made on it to produce ministers of the gospel. It is worth while to quote this portion of the advertisement in full, coming as it undoubtedly did from President Witherspoon's own pen, and giving such clear evidence of his attitude toward the higher purposes of academic training:

The Trustees further give Notice, that they have made Provisions for the Encouragement of young Gentlemen, who have finished the ordinary Course of Philosophy, to return and pursue their Studies at College, and fit themselves for any of the higher Branches, to which they shall think proper chiefly to devote their future Application, whether those called learned Professions, Divinity, Law and Physic, or such liberal Accomplishments in general, as fit young Gentlemen for serving their Country in public Stations. For this purpose, the Professor of Divinity, besides what Attention he may give to the Instruction of the Senior Class will give regular Lectures upon the System. The President also has engaged to give Lectures twice in the Week, on the following Subjects (1) On Chronology and History, civil as well as sacred; a Branch of Study, of itself extremely useful and delightful, and at present in the highest Reputation in every Part of Europe, (2) Critical Lectures on the Scripture, with the Addition of Discourses on Criticism in general; the several Species of Writing, and the fine Arts, (3) Lectures on Composition, and the Eloquence of the Pulpit and the Bar. The President will also endeavour to assist every Student by Conversation according to the main Object, which he shall chuse for his own Studies; and will give Lists and Characters of the principal Writers on any Branch, that Students may accomplish themselves, at the least Expence of Time and Labour. For the Attainment of their Ends, a very valuable Addition to the Public Library was brought over with the President, another large collection of the most standard Books, is newly arrived; and a Third is very soon expected from London. So that this College, which had before all the Advantages for Study, that a retired healthful Place could possess, is now well fur-

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nished with a valuable Public Library, which will be improved by continual Additions. It is to be observed that from those, who after their ordinary Courses, shall return to College, in order to pursue their Studies with those Advantages, no Tuition Money will be required, except that the French language will be taught, if desired, for a very reasonable Gratuity.⁸

It was this prompt, masterful grasp of the reins government this quick infusion of new ideas, and the immediate uplift of an invigorating personality that produced the general feeling naively expressed in a letter by Mr. Sergeant, the college treasurer:

The arrival of Doctor Wetherspoon to our College is very agreeable to its Friends, and are in hopes of much good being done to its Interest by so great & good a Man as he appears to be.⁹

On September 28 the first commencement procession led by the new President went from his door, capped and gowned according to a rule passed at the first meeting of the trustees that he attended, to the Presbyterian Church where he opened the exercises with a "learned & elegant Latin Oration on the Connection & mutual influences of Learning & Piety." This was his inaugural address, an address that has disappeared. Ashbel Green saw the manuscript several years later while he was an undergraduate, but it was not found among Dr. Witherspoon's papers at the time of his death and Green throws no light on its contents.

The most pressing need of the College was more money and more students, and the President seems to have taken very naturally to the task of securing both. He may have been a novice in the business of education, but he had ordinary sense enough to know that a college cannot be maintained only on good intentions and a curriculum; and he lost no time, therefore, in starting his quest for both money and students. Recognizing instantly that he was his own best advertisement, before the sensation of his arrival had died down he seized the opportunity to strike while interest was still excited, and to see and be seen. Early in September he had visited New York, where in Anglican circles at any rate he fell short of his reputation: "The celebrated Dr.

⁸ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser., vol. XXVI, p. 306. This is the first time French was offered as a study at Princeton.

⁹ To Mr. Carey of Boston, September 15, 1768. Princeton University Library.

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Witherspoon is arrived," wrote the Reverend T. B. Chandler from Elizabeth, N. J., to ex-President Johnson of King's College, New York, September 9, 1768, "and all I hear of him is that he makes but an indifferent Figure in the Pulpit."¹⁰ But now that the long vacation was on, he made a trip through New England with Dr. Rodgers, preaching wherever he was invited, appearing for example in four Boston pulpits in three days.¹¹ His visit was not unheralded. As long ago as May 9 the *Boston Chronicle* had quoted the statement of a passenger on a vessel just arrived from Scotland, that Dr. Witherspoon had sold his furniture and preached his farewell sermon, and was soon to sail for America; and undoubtedly his name had occurred more frequently than ever in ministerial correspondence of the late summer. His visit to New England must have been successful for he brought home for the College in cash and promises the sum of one thousand pounds proclamation money, and left in its place the favorable interest he had set out to create. The Reverend Charles Chauncey wrote to Ezra Stiles after this visit that Dr. Witherspoon was

a gentleman of good learning, strong powers, and a catholic, charitable Spirit. We are highly pleased he has come over to be president of the Jersey-College. We are persuaded he will do better than any who have gone before him. He is no friend to the grand and distinguishing Tenets of Mr. Edwards w^{ch}. have been almost universally imbibed in that part of the Country.¹²

And the practically minded Mr. Sergeant wrote again to Mr. Carey:

I am glad the Rev. Dr. Witherspoon met with so good acceptance in your parts, & hope he will prove a great Blessing to our College. He is got safe home.¹³

But by the time this strenuous and keen-eyed Scotsman had "got safe home" he had secured much besides a mere exchange of

¹⁰ Yale University MSS.

¹¹ "Last Monday," said a Boston news item of October 24, "came to town the Reverend Dr. Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey. On Monday he preached the weekly lecture, on Friday he preached at the Rev. Mr. Pemberton's, yesterday forenoon at the old brick, and in the afternoon at the old south meeting-house."

¹² Yale University Library, Stiles MSS. Letter of November 7, 1768.

¹³ Princeton University Library, Letter of November 19, 1768.

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money and "good acceptance." He had seen and learned more about the American colonies than most of his sovereign's cabinet ministers, three thousand miles away, ever cared to know. He had come to America not unready to be surprised; Americans whom he had met in Scotland and England had given him presumably a better notion of the new world than could be derived from the occasional colonial newspapers he may have seen or from the columns of the monthly magazines for which he was a subscriber. But the knowledge he obtained of country and people with his own eyes and ears during the first two months of his life in America had overstepped the bounds of all his imaginings.

Not the least surprising fact was one he learned on his first journey, that it was possible and even customary to travel in America without fear of molestation by footpads and highwaymen—a possibility and a custom almost unknown in Great Britain. Economic conditions were equally contrasting. In Scotland, outside of the largest towns, the people were poor and miserable; living, as Benjamin Franklin observed three years after this date, "in the most sordid wretchedness in dirty hovels of mud and straw, and clothed only in rags." With the exception of a few successful merchants, the lower classes of the inhabitants, farmers and others, were precluded from improving their political status.¹⁴ A few acquired a little money, but they could never acquire any new privilege or rise to have any sort of weight in the legislature of the land. Excepting the 1500 or 2000 voters who elected the representatives of the thirty Scottish counties no farmers nor even landed men were of any political consequence.

In Scotland not only the peasantry but many persons of landed property have no representation at all nor the shadow of a representation. . . . In fact, the lower classes of the people in North Britain, who pay a great proportion of all the taxes imposed on the nation, are as really without representation in parliament as the British colonies in North America,¹⁵

continues the anonymous pamphlet already quoted. Poverty and wretchedness were common enough to go almost unnoticed;

¹⁴ *Candid Enquiry into the Causes of the Migrations from Scotland*. Glasgow, n. d.

¹⁵ *Candid Enquiry*.

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beggars abounded; love of country was slight because there was so little about it that appeared worth loving.

Far different had Dr. Witherspoon found it in America. What Philadelphia, New York, and Boston lacked in size and age and substantiality, they made up in attractiveness and order. None was so picturesque of course as Edinburgh, still in its medieval dress, but on the other hand none was so squalid. Such contrasts and extremes in welfare did not exist, or if they existed were not so obvious. Glasgow, for example, in spite of its growing commercialism probably still retained much of its freshness and charm of thirty years earlier. But the city pavements were reserved for strutting tobacco magnates, men whom no inferior trader ventured to accost,¹⁶ and the haughty pride of quick wealth must have been galling to the less fortunate, and to the poor intolerable.

Along the highroads in America, however, were thriving little villages; beggars were nowhere to be seen; men squared their shoulders and took on a new self-reliance in this land where, as one Scotsman put it, the air was "ever sweet and clear," where there was "no such black foul weather as at home; but a fine pure sky and bright heavens;" no one could "imagine a climate so fine and healthy." Is it any wonder that an immigrant, a former parishioner of Dr. Witherspoon's, has left it on record that the sky in America appeared much further away than at home and was not continually falling in moisture! As the President for the first time traversed New Jersey that September he must have perceived why it was called the "garden of America."¹⁷ His ridings led him past a succession of prosperous farmlands and enticing orchards. In the villages the profusion of flowers and fruit astonished him, and though his turn of mind and his view of the physical world about him were economic and practical rather than aesthetic, yet he could not have been quite blind to the russet and gold of the turning autumn woods, nor totally unconscious that above it all was spread the glory of an Indian-summer sky. And when he observed the comfort in which the small

¹⁶ Mathieson, p. 244.

¹⁷ Alex. Thomson, *News from America*, Glasgow, 1774. An excellent sketch of this immigrant is found in the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, vol. VIII, p. 315.

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farmers lived, and noticed that even servants and laborers and mechanics were well clothed and well fed, his mind must have reverted to the dismal lot of the lower classes in misty Scotland. He returned to Princeton more than ever resolved to do what lay in his power to encourage the poor farmers among his own people to try their lot in this new country where hope and opportunity seemed to be had for the asking. Silent testimony to his interest in Scottish emigration is plentifully found even still in the remnant of his library, and the course of this narrative will show further his practical interest in the problem.

He came back also a wiser man. For, beside the physical appeal of the land, he had received subtler impressions which shaped themselves before long into definite convictions and as such were to have larger results than even his lately gained enthusiasm for the pleasant places in which his lines had fallen. He wrote some time later that a man would become an American more easily and surely by residing in the country three months, than by reading or hearing about it three years. He penned these words on the authority of experience. Just now he was learning what an American was, and unconsciously but none the less surely his own metamorphosis had begun. One might admire the beauty and fertility of the country, be at once impressed as he was by its spaciousness, and yet dismiss these things with the explanation that they were the works of nature, the gifts of God. But the difference between an American and a Briton was a subtler matter and not so easily accounted for. Though Americans spoke of Great Britain as "home," and were proud of their British descent, though they copied British fashions, called their counties, townships, and estates by British names, and sent their sons over sea, when they could afford it, to finish their education in British universities and schools of law and medicine,¹⁸ yet Dr. Witherspoon soon found that there was a distinct spirit of Americanism abroad in the land, that Americans had a solidarity, and homely loyalties, and ways of thinking especially in matters political, which they had worked out for themselves, of

¹⁸ This is virtually Dr. Witherspoon's own language in his "Letter on the Contest between Great Britain and America," *Works*, vol. IV, p. 301, where he is speaking of the attachment of the people of America to those of Great Britain.

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which he had heard but little and of whose origin and growth he knew less. Most novel to him was their un-British conception of representative government. Like the majority of Britons he had believed—if he had thought enough about them to have beliefs at all—that the difficulties between the mother country and her precocious colonies had been to a large extent smoothed out by the repeal of the Stamp Act. His belief would have been that of Mr. John Adams, though phrased less lyrically, to the effect that the repeal of this measure had “hushed into silence almost every popular clamor, and composed every wave of popular disorder into smooth and peaceful calm.” But Dr. Witherspoon found in 1768 that Charles Townshend’s Revenue Acts had stirred the controversy up afresh. At Boston between sermons he had not failed to hear the story of the riot in June when Mr. John Hancock’s sloop *Liberty* was seized by custom officials for not complying with the regulations; he must have learned that in August, the very month he landed at Philadelphia, the Boston merchants had signed a non-importation agreement, that in September almost a hundred towns in Massachusetts had met in convention to adopt measures, that the inhabitants of Boston had assembled in Faneuil Hall and solemnly resolved that “at the utmost peril of their lives and fortunes they would maintain and defend their rights, liberties, and privileges and immunities,” and that on the very day he was presiding over his first commencement at Princeton, two additional British regiments had arrived at Boston to maintain order. He learned too that the merchants of New York had agreed to the non-importation proposal. Little else was being talked about just then in this remarkable country where the average citizen seemed better educated, conversed more intelligently and with greater confidence, and had a wider, keener knowledge of the history as well as of the administrative law of his country than his fellow in Scotland or England. And somehow involved with the present grievance was a question of rights which were not so called in Great Britain—certainly not in Scotland—but which had grown up by imperceptible degrees and were jealously clung to by Americans, and among which certain notions continually asserted themselves; to wit—that whatever the original settlers’ reasons may have been for coming to Amer-

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ica, the one point on which all were agreed was that they considered themselves as having brought their liberty with them, and as entitled, therefore, to all the rights and privileges of freemen; that the colonists looked upon it as the foundation stone of British liberty that the freeholders or proprietors of the soil should have the exclusive right of granting money for public use; that the Colonies considered themselves as not directly subject to the British Parliament, but as separate independent dominions under the same sovereign.¹⁹ And it must have dawned on him that he was meeting on every hand adherents to a radical political philosophy not understood in England, nor even accepted universally in the Colonies, but whose democratic features were singularly appealing to a dominant strain in his own nature.²⁰ It never entered his mind at this time, of course, that separation between Great Britain and the American Colonies was inevitable, still less that it was in sight. Nothing was farther from his expectations than the civil war that was to come within a decade.²¹

Even in the orations delivered in September from the Princeton commencement platform there was a strong flavor of current politics. The salutatory of young Mr. Pierpont Edwards of Connecticut was on "Civil Liberty" and the fact that it was in Latin did not prevent it from being considered "spirited." Among the theses defended on the rostrum were these portentous propositions: "It is to the interest of any nation to have the trade of its new countries as free from embarrassment as possible," and "It is lawful for every man, and in many cases his indisputable duty, to hazard his life in defence of his civil liberty," while the valedictorian took "Patriotism" for his subject. Commencement orations in our less rhetorical twentieth century are seldom of interest save to the speakers' devoted friends and relatives; but

¹⁹"Memorial and Manifesto of the United States," *Works*, vol. IV, p. 218. This is very nearly the language of Governor Bernard of Massachusetts who had said in a report home in 1765: "In America, they (the colonial governments) claim to be perfect states, no otherwise dependent on Great Britain than by having the same king."

²⁰He was receiving current pamphlets on these matters, sent to him by his new friends in Boston and elsewhere, which he carefully grouped together and bound in volumes for his library.

²¹"The Druid," in *Works*, vol. IV. p. 167.

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the eighteenth century American public really seems to have enjoyed them; they were the earliest "fruits of academical education" as a contemporary critic called them, the first outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual graces derived from a college education at a time when a college education was still a distinction. But these Princeton orations had a deeper significance and President Witherspoon, as he laid aside his gown and bands after the echoes of the day's oratory had blown away, must have done some hard thinking. If Princeton undergraduates seriously discussed these questions of the hour, what was to be expected of their fathers? What indeed was to be expected of these boys themselves when they should reach maturity? Hardly in a more striking way could he have realized how much to heart America was taking what British cabinet ministers thought of lightly or not at all.²²

For the time being, however, he kept his thoughts to himself. With open eyes and keen ears, but with his mouth shut tight as to politics, he tended his own business and it prospered. Ever present and especially pressing just now was the problem of secondary education on which he plainly saw that higher education rested; and so we find in the *Pennsylvania Journal* of March 2, 1769, a second delightfully frank advertisement of the grammar school at Nassau Hall, wherein the President takes the public comfortably into his confidence. The previous advertisement had met with flattering response; the number of pupils had exceeded all expectations; the President was directing the school in person; he was introducing European methods, and Mr. Houston was taking his orders. In Latin he was applying the pedagogical method of the Glasgow public grammar school (which must have sounded extremely up-to-date); he was also using "a book of classic maps to point out the places spoken of," and the master was being coached by the President on classical antiquities so that he might explain allusions to manners, customs and laws of the ancients. The "terrestrial globe" was in frequent use and

²² A recent writer has pointed out that after 1770 for three years the Colonies were hardly mentioned in Parliament, and a page or two of the *Annual Register* was thought sufficient to chronicle American doings. Becker, *Beginnings of the American People*, p. 231.

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geography was being taught "by occasional exercises for amusement rather than for a task." Nor were grammar, reading, and spelling neglected, and every Sunday evening the boys were instructed in the principles of religion. The new President's aim seems to have been to do away with as much unnecessary drudgery as possible in elementary studies and to enlist the attention of his scholars by securing their interest. The best guarantee of the work done he soon perceived would be the ranking of his pupils who entered the College upstairs from the school in the basement of Nassau Hall, when compared with that of boys admitted from other schools; it would be "a terrible reproach," he concedes, if his own boys proved inadequately prepared; and, therefore, "it is expected, and even hoped, that other schoolmasters will by a laudable emulation keep us hard and close to our duty." This characteristic document reads in full as follows:

Nassau Hall, Princeton, Mar. 2, 1769

In terms of the advertisement formerly published, the Grammar School at Princeton was begun precisely on the 7th of November last. The numbers considering the shortness of the time, have exceeded expectation. The design of this present notice is to assure the public, that according to my promise to the trustees, I have undertaken the conduct of it; that the young man who teaches it receives his whole directions from me, and has hitherto given the greatest satisfaction by fidelity and diligence in the execution of them. He is furnished with a book of directions for masters to form their pupils to a thorough knowledge of the Latin language, drawn up by one who was long Rector of the public grammar school in Glasgow, the seat of one of the universities in Scotland, and taught it with as great reputation and success as any that ever appeared in that country. He is furnished with a book of classic maps, to point out the places spoken of in any author the scholars may happen to read, and it is particularly recommended to him to study the Roman & Greek antiquities, that he may be able to explain any word that refers to the customs and manners of the ancients or the constitutions of their several states. He is also furnished with a terrestrial globe, that they may be taught Geography, by occasional exercises for amusement rather than a task. One hour every day is spent in writing and arithmetick; And it is proposed to have a weekly exercise of reading in English authors with propriety and grace with remarks on the grammar and spelling of the English

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tongue. Every Lord's day evening since the school began, the scholars have been convened, and instructed in the principles of religion. This is done for the sake of those whose parents live at a distance, and will be carefully continued. On the whole the public may rest assured that no pains will be spared to make the instruction at this school complete and accurate: and indeed they have a pretty sure pledge of our fidelity, because the scholars who enter college from this school must be a sort of standard for the qualifications of those who are to be admitted from other places. It would be a terrible reproach to offer insufficient scholars brought up within our own walls, and it is expected and even hoped that other school masters will by laudable emulation keep us hard and close to our duty.

J. WITHERSPOON ²³

In May, 1769, he issued a further notice which plainly indicates his interest in the relation between the College and the grammar schools and his insistence that teachers be thoroughly familiar with Princeton's entrance regulations. In the first place the requirement of four year's residence for the bachelor's degree which was to have gone into effect in September, 1769, had been totally repealed, so that admission was upon the same footing as before. He informs the public that a strict and impartial entrance examination will be held in each case, and in order "that no schoolmaster, or others concerned in the scholars, may have reason to complain of advantage being taken against them" he reprints the 1748 and 1760 entrance requirements. He then announces that a candidate for entrance into any class except the freshman will pass the final public examination of the next lower class, or if by mishap he came too late for this ordeal three members of the class he proposes to enter will be drawn by lot, and by "fair comparison" with them in a special examination he will be either "admitted or degraded"—a novel and not altogether inadequate device. Furthermore it is expected and desired that masters sending a number of boys to college come with them and be present—and assist—at their examination. This co-operation between school and college examiners in entrance tests is a fair anticipation of the characteristic feature of the present College Entrance Examination Board. "By this means," says the notice,

²³*New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXVI, p. 384.

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the schoolmen "will have the opportunity of seeing justice done to them, and all suspicion of unfairness and partiality will be effectually prevented."²⁴

Meanwhile the light of the President's ecclesiastical prominence in Scotland could not be hidden under any number of bushels in the shape of American educational problems, and he had fallen quickly and naturally into his right place in the American Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery of New Brunswick, to which he had neglected until April, 1769, to present his letter of dismissal from Paisley, had received him warmly and he found himself a delegate to the annual meeting of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia. At this meeting (May, 1769,) the President could have had no adverse criticism to make of his reception for he was accorded every mark of honor—if indeed it were unqualified honor to be put on eight separate committees at his first appearance. He was appointed, moreover, to head the delegation from the Synod to the convention with the Associations of Connecticut to be held at New Haven in the following September and to open the convention with a sermon. His foreign connections were likewise responsible for his being added to the committee to revise the letters which the Synod had ordered written to the Church in Holland, Switzerland, Scotland, Ireland, etc.

The College of New Jersey occupied an extreme share of the Synod's attention at this meeting. In 1768 an application from the trustees had been read requesting that a part of the annual collection recently ordered for the promotion of Christian knowledge be appropriated to the support of a divinity professor at Princeton. The request was refused but the sum of fifty pounds was loaned to the corporation for the purpose named, and it was agreed to make a special collection for the same object. The funds proving insufficient, in May, 1769, a fresh application was made by the trustees requesting assistance in raising money for the support of the College. Learning of the low funds of the College, the Presbytery ordered subscriptions to be gathered and although the results were incredibly slow nevertheless by April, 1772, nine congregations had subscribed the sum of £662.14.2

²⁴ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser., vol. XXVI, p. 426.

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of which only £367 had been collected. Dr. Witherspoon, Professor Blair and Mr. William Peartree Smith were directed to draw up a statement of the condition of the College for distribution among the several congregations, and five hundred copies of their report were ordered printed for that purpose.²⁵ Furthermore, twenty-five members of the Synod were appointed agents in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia and South Carolina, to "use their utmost endeavors to obtain subscriptions." To Dr. Witherspoon in particular, assisted by two others, was assigned Philadelphia and Bucks County, Pennsylvania; and with the Reverend James Caldwell, who had already made a successful begging tour in Long Island and adjacent parts of New Jersey, he was further directed to visit the southern parts of Virginia.

There is no doubt that his presence had given fresh force to the claims of the College. From various parts of the country reports began to come in of subscriptions set on foot. Dr. John Rodgers, the New York trustee, went to South Carolina to collect the benefactions there awaiting an authorized agent; Mr. Caldwell, elected a trustee that autumn and not content with Virginia as his sole field of operations, became agent in Maryland, the two Carolinas and Georgia, and gathered in a thousand pounds above his expenses. The subscriptions in Georgia were paid chiefly in produce and the College went temporarily into the shipping business, chartering a small vessel to proceed to Georgia and bring the produce up from the south.

Our Jersey College, wrote Dr. Alison to Mr. Stiles in none too generous a strain, is now talking as if she was to be a bulwark against Episcopacy. I should rejoice to see her Pistols like honest Teague's, grown up into great Guns. The President is an active man, a good Preacher: and has done much to procure funds; but still they want able professors, and ye college is in statu quo, save only that he is constituted a professor of Divinity; this they greatly wanted, and this Department he will, I expect, convince the world was fittest for him. I hear no great things of his Superior Knowledge in any Branch of

²⁵ No copy of this document, manuscript or printed, has been traced.

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Philosophy. But I think he will do better than any that they have had of late years, or could have chosen in the Bounds of our Synod.²⁶

Contemporary observers of American academic occasions must have found the Princeton commencement of September, 1769, unusually interesting. Besides being the first time that the honorary degree of doctor of laws was conferred in America, a particular curiosity was attached to the recipients of this degree and of an honorary master's degree conferred the same day. The doctorates fell to Mr. John Dickinson, author of the well-known *Farmer's Letters* and also of the *Liberty Song* which had recently gone the rounds of the colonial press, and to the Honorable Joseph Galloway, speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and later the author of the *Speech* urging the king to resume the powers of government, a production which Mr. Dickinson severely criticized. The master's degree was conferred on Mr. John Hancock of Boston, already a public hero thanks to the adventure of his sloop, the *Liberty*. College commencement platforms bring together oddly contrasting personages; but in view of recent events this was a curious trio to watch and the manner of Mr. Galloway and Mr. Dickinson toward one another must have been especially worth observing. Nor is the group less interesting from the vantage point of subsequent history: Galloway, on purely intellectual grounds finding himself in a few years forced into loyalism and exile, Dickinson becoming a conservative and unpopular patriot, and Hancock rising to be a leader of the revolutionary party, and the president of the Continental Congress that resolved on independence. Even if the expectations of the board of trustees were mistaken in the case of Mr. Galloway, the honoring of Dickinson and Hancock showed frankly whither the sympathies of the College of New Jersey were tending.

Immediately after commencement Dr. Witherspoon set out on his first trip to Virginia. "Doct^r Witherspoon's business to Virginia," wrote young James Madison of the sophomore class

²⁶ Stiles MSS. Letter of August 1, 1769. In order to release part of the funds used for his salary, Professor Blair that spring had resigned the professorship of divinity to which he had so recently been elected, and Dr. Witherspoon had assumed the duties of the chair in his place, with an additional salary of fifty pounds.

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to his father in a letter which the Doctor himself bore, "Doct^r Witherspoon's business to Virginia is nearly the same, as I conjecture (i.e., collecting funds) and perhaps to form some acquaintance to induce Gentlemen to send their sons to this College." At Williamsburg in Virginia, one Sunday afternoon late in October, the visitor drew such a concourse of people that no building was large enough to hold his audience and he preached in the capitol yard which was crowded. After the sermon a collection was taken up amounting to sixty-six pounds to which the governor added another twenty. In the following February Dr. Witherspoon was back in Virginia evidently on college business, for when he returned the College owed him some thirty-two pounds for expenses. He was revealing unsuspected powers of adaptability and was finding himself as much at home in Virginia as in Massachusetts. He admired the northern Colonies, especially Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and welcomed the impartiality with which every denomination was treated, and he himself could in his turn be as impartial when he came into Colonies where influence other than Presbyterian prevailed. He soon learned to expect in the aristocratic South and particularly in Virginia a welcome and a hospitality that in warmth and lavishness equalled if it did not exceed anything in the North. Pleasant though he had found New Jersey, there were provinces pleasanter still—where the first question in the catechism, for instance, did not sternly approach the matter of man's chief end, but satisfied itself with merely asking his name, provinces where an old-world courtesy and chivalry existed toward women and strangers, and where life's enjoyment in the open-handed, happily careless fashion of the plantation was in marked contrast with the more business-like though not less genuine kindness of the compacter and more commercial North. He noticed, however, that the southern Colonies "blessed as they are with a superior soil and more powerful sun," were greatly inferior to Pennsylvania and New England "in numbers, strength, and value of land in proportion to its quantity." And he "easily solved" the question of causes. The constitutions of the northern Colonies were "more favorable to universal industry," and we need go no

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further he said, "to have the full force of liberty" illustrated.²⁷

From trips to these parts of the country the President never returned empty-handed. Even when he brought back no money—which was seldom—he brought back new friendships with wealthy planters and so not only strengthened the foundations of the marked southern affiliations that Princeton was to have during the rest of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, but also created the wide acquaintance which he personally enjoyed and which during his later American career he turned to his adopted country's good account. It was in this way for example that he met the Madisons, the Lees, and the Washingtons. James Madison had entered Princeton in the summer of 1769 but his father had never met President Witherspoon. In October, 1771, young Madison hopes that his father will meet the Doctor during the latter's visit to Virginia—"I am persuaded that you would be much pleased with him & that he would be very glad to see you."²⁸ At what date he met the Lees we do not know, but that he was on friendly footing with the family is evident from the following letter to Colonel Henry Lee which also suggests the attitude of parental oversight that he assumed towards boys entrusted to his care.

Princeton, Dec. 28, 1770

Sir

I wrote you by post, on the receipt of your letter by Joseph Cross, and now have drawn out your Account, that it may be ready to go by him, who has promised to call on his return. You cannot judge perfectly of what will be their Expense till the year is completed, for the inclosed Account contains not only the necessaries for Henry's Chamber at first coming to College, but his College board for the whole year, which will by order of the Trustees be paid every six Months in advance. At the expiration of the year I will send you the necessary Acct.

I have nothing to add to what I writ formerly of the behaviour of your Sons, and their progress in their Learning. It has always been in all respects agreeable. John Wilkinson is very well, seems to be happy

²⁷ "Reflections on public affairs," *Works*, vol. IV, p. 202.

²⁸ *Writings of Madison*, ed. G. Hunt vol. I, p. 8. One of Madison's brothers followed him to Princeton but was not graduated.

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and has begun his studies with alacrity. The School is to be publicly examined by the Officers of the College, and some neighbouring Gentlemen on Monday next. If Joseph Cross does not pass before that time and anything happens worth communicating shall add it to this letter.

There is a French Gentleman come here lately from St. Domingo, who proposes to stay about 6 months to study the English Language. This will be a happy opportunity for acquainting our young people with the pronunciation and giving them a habit of Speaking french which I was before introducing here.

I learn from Mess^{rs} Madison & Wallace how much we are indebted to you for your favourable opinion and friendship, the continuance of which we will do a lot to deserve.

Please offer my respectful Compliments to Mrs. Lee and your family & believe me

Dear Sir
Your most Obed^t humble Servant

JOHN WITHERSPOON

Col. Henry Lee ²⁹

There seems to be no record of President Witherspoon's first meeting with Washington. The latter's favorable acquaintance with Princeton probably antedated that occasion, however, for in 1769 he had offered to pay the entire college expenses at Princeton of his kinsman William Ramsay, Jr., "a youth fond of study & instruction, and disposed to a studious life." Washington authorized the boy's father to depend on him for the lad's support as long as would be necessary to complete his education, and in case of his own death the letter in which this offer was made was to be obligatory upon Washington's heirs or execu-

²⁹ Crimmins Collection. The Henry mentioned in the first paragraph of this letter is the future "Light Horse Harry" of Revolutionary fame, Governor of Virginia, and father of General Lee. A few weeks before this his brother-in-law, Dr. William Shippen, Jr., of Philadelphia had written of him to Richard Henry Lee in the following language: "We are much disappointed in not seeing you here with your son or sons on your way to Dr. Witherspoon. . . . I am persuaded there is not such a school on the Continent. Your cousin Henry Lee is in College and will be one of the first fellows in this country. He is more than strict in morality; he has a fine genius and is too diligent. Charles is in the Grammar School and the Dr. expects much from his genius and application too." (*Southern Literary Messenger*, vol. XXVII, p. 443) Part of this letter is quoted in Fitzhugh Lee, *General Robert E. Lee*, p. 8. Henry Lee was graduated in 1773, Charles in 1775.

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tors.³⁰ Washington very speedily valued Dr. Witherspoon's advice. His stepson, John Parke Custis, had at this time as his tutor the Reverend Jonathan Boucher, an Anglican clergyman, and it would appear that Washington, probably thinking of college for him, asked Dr. Witherspoon on one of his early trips to Virginia to examine the boy. The President did so and found him scholastically wanting. On Washington reverting to Boucher, the latter, irritated by the criticism of a Presbyterian minister of three years teaching experience, replied somewhat tartly. Dr. Witherspoon had said that the boy should have begun Greek. "This Business of Education is a complex & extensive Subject," Mr. Boucher would have his patron understand, "& a man should be well acquainted with it, before He ventures to pronounce how far another has or has not done his Duty;"³¹ Witherspoon's criticism must have been made at random; it was not possible for him to have found out what Mr. Boucher ought to have done, in the few questions he put to the boy; if the Doctor had examined him "candidly & fully," he would have found him, to be sure, not full of "dry, useless & disgusting School-boy kind of learning fit only for a Pedant," but he would have found him not ill accomplished, considering his manners, temper, and years, in that liberal, manly, and necessary knowledge befitting a gentleman; at any rate, if Washington contemplates a change, Mr. Boucher begs he will not send the boy to Princeton; William and Mary is better in every respect; if not there, then to King's College in New York,³² for the unexpressed reason that both of these were good Anglican institutions. The Princeton matriculation lists are incomplete and we do not know whether young Custis ever entered Princeton or not. He was never graduated. But a quarter of a century later Washington sent John Custis' son, George Washington Parke Custis, to Princeton under Witherspoon's successor, President Smith, and in his correspondence with this attractive but negligent youth may be found further indications of Washington's attachment to the College of New Jersey.

³⁰ *Writings of Washington*, ed. Jared Sparks, vol. II, p. 350.

³¹ In Witherspoon's Library is Boucher's copy of the *Plan of Education at Mr. Elphinstone's Academy, Kensington*. Did the tutor send the pamphlet to the President so that the latter might learn something about this complex business of education?

³² *Letters to Washington*, ed. S. M. Hamilton, vol. IV, p. 83.

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Dr. Witherspoon was not breaking altogether new ground when he made his first southern tours in the interest of the College—indeed, at that time he could not have ventured far in any direction without coming across a Princeton trail, a fact which would have readily occurred to him on his first appearance at the Synod of New York and Philadelphia had he been familiar with the Princeton alumni lists. For, of the forty-eight ministers and elders present, sixteen were graduates, four were honorary graduates and four were officers of the College, while of the seventy absentees whose names were recorded in the minutes thirty-five were graduates or officers. Accordingly, when he struck south from Philadelphia he found a Princeton tradition already sprung up, planted by alumni from the earliest classes down to the present. For the most part they were ministers of the gospel, many of them serving widely scattered charges in remote and unexpected settlements—men like James Hunt of 1759 in Maryland, and Thomas Martin of 1764 from whose school Princeton received James Madison; or John Brown of 1749, and his classmate James Todd, both keeping alive in Virginia the influence of Samuel Davies in turning likely young men toward Princeton; or itinerant missionaries like Hezekiah Balch of 1762, who had been teaching ever since graduation and was now preaching through Virginia and North Carolina. Had Dr. Witherspoon visited the latter province, he would have found the Princeton influence astonishingly strong, spread by men like Hugh McAden of 1753 and Alexander Martin of 1756, or Alexander Macwhorter of 1757 at Queen's Museum, Joseph Alexander of 1760 at Sugar Creek, David Caldwell of 1761 at Greensboro, and Henry Patillo in Orange County—most of them conducting schools which were making honorable history for themselves and for early southern education. At Charleston in South Carolina he would have found Hugh Alison of 1762 beginning his school; and in Georgia he might have heard how Whitefield, seeking a charter for his ill-fated Orphan House at Bethesda near Savannah, had desired one similar to Princeton's.

Without pretending to complete the list of Princeton associations, these names are sufficient to show that throughout the southern communities were to be found graduates of the Col-

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lege of New Jersey consciously exerting on behalf of higher education an influence of which Dr. Witherspoon and the College were to reap the benefit, and which the latter was to repay by the stream of vigorous public-spirited and well-trained men sent back year after year to the South to play leading parts in southern clerical, legal, political and educational circles, or as private citizens to manage their ancestral estates and bear honorably their share of local and untrumpeted responsibility. The genuinely remarkable story of the Princeton tradition in the South is still an unwritten chapter of American social progress; but it will be seen later in these pages that President Witherspoon's energetic support of this tradition was not the least of his legacies to his adopted country.

In his own Province meanwhile he was throwing himself heart and soul into his new work and losing no opportunity to further the interests of the College. He was a man who wasted but little time when a decision had to be reached. An example of his promptness to act is the story of his acquisition of David Rittenhouse's orrery, that remarkable clock-work contrivance for illustrating the motion of the heavenly bodies. The authorities of the University of Pennsylvania had this mechanism under consideration but wished to sleep over their plans before they made a decision. The dismay of the Reverend Provost William Smith when he learned from the newspapers that Dr. Witherspoon had stolen a march on him and had quietly gone to Norriston, where Rittenhouse was living in straitened circumstances, and had closed a bargain for the purchase of the orrery, must have appealed to Dr. Witherspoon's sense of humor quite as much as the two hundred and fifty pounds in hard cash had appealed to the impoverished inventor. Provost Smith could not understand why Rittenhouse "should think so little of his noble invention, as to consent to let it go to a village," when he had within his grasp the opportunity of all the free advertising afforded by the city of Philadelphia. The Governor of Pennsylvania himself declared that the orrery should not leave the state, even if he had to pay for it out of his own pocket; he thought that Pennsylvania ought to have the first orrery, even if the second which Rittenhouse promised to make were a better one; and he went so far as

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to call a meeting of the trustees of the University on the matter. But he was too late, and the Pennsylvanians had to content themselves with the duplicate, which, be it said in passing, has been much better treated than the Princeton original.

That summer in July (1770) an incident occurred on the college campus, which while unimportant in itself, nevertheless, was significant of a certain wind that was blowing. When the letter of the New York merchants breaking the non-importation agreement and inviting Philadelphia to do likewise, came through Princeton, the undergraduates seized it and burnt it in front of Nassau Hall, "all of them," writes Madison to his father, "appearing in their black Gowns & the bell tolling."³³ A letter from Princeton quoted in the newspapers gives further details:

This afternoon (July 13) the Students at Nassau Hall fired with a just Indignation on reading the infamous Letter from the Merchants in New York, to the Committee of Merchants in Philadelphia, informing them of their Resolution, to send Home orders for Goods contrary to their Non-Importation Agreement, at the tolling of the College Bell, went in Procession to a Place fronting the College, and burnt the Letter by the Hands of a Hangman, hired for the Purpose, with hearty Wishes, that the Names of all Promoters of such a daring Breach of Faith, may be blasted in the Eyes of every Lover of Liberty, and their Names handed down to Posterity, as Betrayers of their Country.³⁴

Dr. Witherspoon probably witnessed the whole performance from the discreet shelter of his study window, but if he filed any remonstrance it is not on record. His sympathies were already with New England. At the preceding commencement the College, as we have seen, had honored John Hancock of Boston; in the spring the President had received a copy of the official *Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre at Boston* on March 5. Whatever he may have thought of the "massacre" he said nothing publicly concerning it, but in a letter to the *Scots Magazine* in May, 1771, he made a passing reference to Dr. Lathrop's sermon "Innocent Blood crying for Vengeance," delivered on the subject of the "massacre," which is not without value in hinting at his position on the incident:

³³ *Writings of Madison*, ed. G. Hunt, vol. I, p. 7, letter of July 23, 1770.

³⁴ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXVII, p. 203.

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As to the author's observations on Dr. Lathrop's sermon, I shall say little; because perhaps it cannot be wholly justified—yet, if all circumstances are duly attended to, there is as little reason to insult or glory over the people of Boston, as there was to excite the public resentment against Captain P.

The College was getting itself in print on the colonial side. In July the *New York Gazette*, commenting on a phrase in a letter from New Brunswick to the effect that “the senior class at Nassau Hall have unanimously agreed to appear at their ensuing commencement, dressed in American Manufactures”—the first known instance of class action at Princeton—, continues:

How happy ought we to esteem ourselves, when we see some of our Youth, who will probably fill some of the highest stations in their Country, when their Fathers have fallen asleep, so early declaring their Love to their Country; and we hope this will meet with the Esteem which is their Due, and that many at this critical Juncture, will follow their laudable Example, in encouraging our own Manufactures.³⁵

The appearance of the class a couple of months later at commencement proudly wearing American cloth brought forth still more flattering comment: “That truly noble and patriotic Spirit which inflames the Breasts of those who are real Lovers of their Country,” wrote a gentleman in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* after attending the exercises,

seems already implanted in theirs (the students'). I have the Pleasure to inform you, their united Efforts to appear in Cloth manufactured in America, succeeded to their Wish. May I not then say with the young Gentlemen, that the gayest Butterfly in all the Assembly, in all its borrowed Plumes, did not appear more brilliant than his Class-mates, who were that Day honored with their Attendance. What too sanguine Hopes can we have of those Gentlemen, and such Principles so early instilled in them?³⁶

The exercises themselves more strongly than ever reflected current politics. One of the Latin theses proposed that subjects were bounden to resist their king and defend their liberties if he ignored the laws of the State or treated his subjects cruelly, and

³⁵ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXVII, p. 209.

³⁶ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXVII, p. 292.

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the discussion though in Latin gathered especial flavor from the facts that His Excellency William Franklin, Governor of the province and representative of His Majesty the King, sat within arm's length of the speakers, and that James Witherspoon, the President's eldest son, was defender of the thesis. Little did this boy dream that before he had been ten years out of college he was to lay down his life in defence of that very proposition. A debate in English followed, declaring that the non-importation agreement reflected a glory on the American merchants and was a noble exertion of self-denial and public spirit. The utility of American manufactures was a corollary, and was the subject of an oration by young Frederick Frelinghuysen, soon to be a leader in the Revolution. A debate in Latin succeeded on the thesis that "All men by law of nature are free." And if the tone of any of the exercises had irritated Governor Franklin, Samuel Witham Stockton of 1767, who delivered the master's oration, did his best to smooth down ruffled gubernatorial plumes by paying him "a particular complimentary address."

The College was growing rapidly. Including the grammar scholars there were one hundred and fifteen boys in Nassau Hall, a larger number than it had ever sheltered. How completely Dr. Witherspoon had won the confidence of his trustees is shown by the compliment with which they repealed a temporary rule passed before his arrival granting each member of the faculty sole authority as to the time and method of recitations heard by him. The board now voted that "the President of the College is invested with the sole direction as to the Methods of Education to be pursued in this Seminary," and that no previous resolution should

exclude him from the Sole Direction whenever he may think proper to interfere in the Conduct & Regulation of the Modes of Instruction; he being chiefly answerable to the World for the particular Steps which are taken in educating the Pupils trained up in this College, and the Trustees have been so fully satisfied from experience of his great Abilities in the Management of the Institution committed to his Care, & with high Pleasure have seen his indefatigable Labours & Success in raising the Reputation of this College; they are clearly of Opinion that all the Authority above declared to be annexed by the said Law

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to the Office of President of the College, is highly proper to be put into the hands of the Rev^d Doct^r Witherspoon the new President.³⁷

This is the first time that the prerogatives of the Presidency had been defined, and the occupant of that office at Princeton remained an autocrat until the second decade of the twentieth century, when under the leadership of President Hibben a proper share of faculty autonomy, based on the principle of cooperation between the executive and the teaching officers of the University, was inaugurated.

While his personal popularity was daily increasing, opinion in college differed as to the President's power in the pulpit. To some students, like Fithian, his sermons were "almost inimitable," but to others he was "what we call a dull preacher." He himself early perceived that he was not followed so easily in America as in Scotland, which in view of his marked Scottish accent was to be expected; but at best he was not a magnetic speaker. His undergraduates noticed this lack of warmth in his pulpit manner. When a revival of religious enthusiasm sprang up on the campus in the summer of 1770, they invited the Reverend Jedidiah Chapman of Newark to visit them and he spent a week at Princeton preaching three times and meeting inquirers in "praying societies." Early in 1772 there was another outburst of religious interest fostered largely by the effort of Ebenezer Bradford, a student in the Class of 1773 but fresh from Connecticut and the inspiration of the Reverend Dr. Joseph Bellamy of Woodbury, a late follower of Jonathan Edwards' idealistic philosophy. Here again the students sent not across the campus for their matter-of-fact President but this time over to Trenton for the Reverend Dr. Elihu Spencer who preached with "a great deal of warmth and zeal" although, so it was alleged, "not with so much judgment, accuracy, and clearness as could have been desired." The real difficulty with Dr. Spencer was that his doctrine was not sufficiently advanced, but in spite of this he seems to have been successful in making the dry bones of this particular academic valley rattle, for Bradford, whose criticism is the one quoted above, admitted that he roused the attention of most of

³⁷ Minutes of the Board, September, 1770.

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the students. Even college exercises yielded right of way, so Andrew Hunter informed Fithian:

We have had a considerable stir of religion since you went away, he wrote, Lewis Wilson is said to have got religion; and the formerly abandoned Glover is seeking the way to heaven. Our orations are put off lest they should do harm to some under concern.³⁸

It was of this revival that the biographers of Colonel Aaron Burr assert that President Witherspoon did not approve. Dr. Ashbel Green, however, took pains to enquire of men who had been students at that period and their statements totally discredited the assertion. The President undoubtedly may have checked imprudences, says Dr. Green, but there is every reason to believe not only that he did not tell Burr that the revival was mere fanaticism, as the story goes, but that he gave the purely religious phase of the episode his entire support.

Of another phase he surely would have disapproved had he known of it, and this phase is of some historic interest in that it is concerned with the most far reaching philosophical event in President Witherspoon's administration—his fight against Berkeleyan idealism and his substituting in its place the philosophy of the Scottish common sense school of realism. The Reverend Mr. Chapman had reported to Dr. Bellamy that a number of students had attained "the saving knowledge of the truth; and *the truth* [italics are his] prevails greatly, but not without opposition," adding that several students expected to study divinity with Dr. Bellamy. The "opposition" alluded to certainly came from the President. Bishop Berkeley's philosophy had but recently become popular with a little group of tutors and older undergraduates headed by Joseph Periam,³⁹ a tutor who was "a steady, zealous friend to truth"—the particular form of truth taught by Berkeley. When President Witherspoon arrived at

³⁸ Letter of March 1772, Fithian, *Journal*, p. 22. Glover's expulsion a year later for stealing turkeys led Fithian to reflect that "there is no knowing who is converted, only by their after conduct in life."

³⁹ The influence of Periam, a graduate of the Class of 1762, on the intellectual vagaries of the college at this time may be traced in the philosophical experience of Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith (1769); and its effects are alluded to in the dedication of Dr. Frederic Beasley's *Search for Truth* where the philosophical history of this period at Princeton is briefly summarized.

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Princeton these young enthusiasts were much disconcerted to find that he totally discredited the bishop's views. Those views colored the teaching of Dr. Bellamy and his disciple Bradford, and the "eastward" or "new" divinity they represented met with little or no sympathy from Dr. Witherspoon. In fact when Bradford entered Princeton in 1771 he was advised not to let his sentiments be known, as "it would be of great disservice" to him. He found two or three, however, "who dared think for themselves" and they agreed to promote what they judged to be the truth "in as private and hidden a manner as possible." As the awakening increased, there was inquiry for books, and among the most useful was Dr. Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated* which was loaned under strictest promises of secrecy. "In this manner," says Bradford to Bellamy, "the chief of your books were read over several times by a great number of the students; at last we had societies every evening in which we read something." To those who were hostile to the "new divinity" copies of Bellamy's writings were adroitly loaned with the title pages cut out, and thus disguised were "much admired," and finally two hundred reprints of his *True Religion* were subscribed for in the College. Dr. Chapman reported being invited to return to Princeton where "Mr. Edwards' sentiments make surprising progress." President Witherspoon declared he was neither for nor against the new doctrines on the campus, but, adds Bradford, "he both preaches and converses in contradistinction of them." The President unquestionably would have opposed clandestine propaganda whatever the cause represented, and it may have been his discovery of the facts and his frank protests that led the biographers of Colonel Burr into their misstatement.⁴⁰

After commencement in 1770 Dr. Witherspoon made a trip into New England with Ezra Stiles who had been his guest at Princeton, and visited New Haven, Providence, and Boston. At New Haven he enjoyed the hospitality of Mr. Stiles on whom he

⁴⁰The sources of this story are found in the Bellamy Papers in the New Jersey Historical Society containing the correspondence of Chapman and Bradford with Dr. Bellamy. *New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings*, 1 ser., vol. VI, p. 174 ff. The relative importance of this episode in the history of American philosophical thought is indicated in Riley's *American Philosophy*.



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appears to have made a deep impression and with whom he was to keep up an intimacy for the rest of his life. After much conversation, Mr. Stiles recorded in his journal the opinion that Dr. Witherspoon was "a very learned divine," and few men in America were better qualified to judge than this encyclopedic Yale professor. He gives a brief but accurate summary of Witherspoon's life to date, and closes his entry with the significant hieroglyph: "£10 Str.," which being interpreted can mean nothing else than Yale's loss and Princeton's gain.

Dr. Witherspoon's increasing importance in Presbyterian councils is easily discernible not only in the New Jersey records of the time but also in those of the Synod. In 1771 his fellow Presbyterian clergy of New Jersey appointed him their spokesman with Dr. Elihu Spencer in petitioning Governor Franklin for a charter to incorporate a proposed "New Jersey Society for the better Support of the Widows and Education of the Children of deceased Presbyterian Ministers," and the document they filed placed the Governor and his legal advisers in a quandary which is amusingly illustrated in the voluminous papers on the case.⁴¹ As for the Synod, it would be expected that he was annually placed on the committee to disburse the Synod's fund for needy but pious youths at the College of New Jersey; but other appointments such as his election to the Synod's treasurership show a marked deference to the position he occupied in that body's esteem. Seven times he was a member of the annual commission which sat between meetings of the Synod; he was frequently deputed to visit and report on David Brainerd's Indian School which was under the Synod's care; with Dr. Rodgers he was ordered in 1771 to draw up the Synod's reply to a letter from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and to frame letters to the churches in Holland and Geneva. He was placed on the committee to review all the synodical replies to foreign communications and he seems to have been chosen in particular to interview ministers presenting letters of dismissal from churches in Scotland and Ireland and seeking admission to colonial presbyteries. At his first attendance in the Synod he had been made

⁴¹ *New Jersey Archives*, vol. X, p. 339, etc. S. H. Cobb, *Rise of Religious Liberty in America*, refers to this case as curiously revealing the governmental notion that there was, or ought to have been, a Church of England Establishment in New Jersey.

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chairman of a committee to communicate with seceding ministers and seek to bring about a union between them and the Synod; similarly in 1772 he was appointed chairman of a committee to consider relations with the Associate Presbytery; and from 1769 until the Revolution he was annually a delegate from the Synod to the Conventions with the General Association of Connecticut. It is regrettable that the records of these conventions are so scanty, for one would suppose that President Witherspoon's part in their proceedings was large. But the only inference that can be drawn from the records themselves and from the failure of his writings to show any allusion to the subject which gave the conventions their chief reason for existence, is that he was not active in the movement. The facts follow. The conventions had been organized in 1766 of representatives of the Synod and of the associated Congregational churches of Connecticut to meet annually, with the primary object of uniting the dissenting forces in the Colonies against the introduction of an American episcopate deriving authority from the Crown, and also for the purpose of cultivating, by correspondence with dissenting bodies in Great Britain, their support of this object. Dr. Witherspoon's name occurs in the minutes of the Convention for the first time in September, 1769. He had been selected by the Synod to preach the opening sermon, but did not attend. The Convention appointed him and the Reverend William Tennent a committee to correspond with ministers in Scotland. No report of their work was ever made. At the 1770 meeting, it being clear that the utility of the Convention was not understood by the ministers of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, the President "now on his journey to the Eastward," was requested to impress them with the necessity of joining the Convention; and the following year, in his absence, it was reported that he had obeyed his instructions, though with what success was not known. In 1772 and 1773 he was again a delegate and he opened the Convention of 1773 with a sermon. Appointed chairman of the meeting he officially signed a letter written by a committee of the Convention to the Committee of Dissenters in England, the only document on the subject of the episcopate that bears his name; but he was not the author of this paper, nor even a member of the reporting committee. At this meeting he was di-



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rected to obtain information on the state of religious liberty in Canada; but here again there is no evidence that he ever reported.

His name does not occur in the Minutes of 1774 and 1775 although appointed a delegate; the minutes of 1776 are lost; no subsequent sessions were held; and the outcome of the Revolutionary War settled the question of an American episcopate created by the British government.⁴²

The Reverend Dr. John DeWitt, in his historical sketch of the College, has noticed the marked contrast between the tone of commencement performances before the Stamp Act controversy and the inspiration of those succeeding that period, and allusion has already been made in these pages to one or two of Witherspoon's early commencement programmes. In 1771 the chief attraction was a poetical dialogue on *The Rising Glory of America* written by Hugh Brackenridge and Philip Freneau, a performance that instantly recalls in contrast the production given a decade earlier entitled *The Military Glory of Great Britain*, and illustrates perfectly the change in tone and inspiration. The Brackenridge-Freneau dialogue received great applause and had the honor of being quoted in the London newspapers. After recounting the story of the discovery of America and the settling of the Colonies, the speakers gaze into the future and see visions of

A thousand Kingdoms rais'd, cities and men
Num'rous as sand upon the ocean shore;
The Ohio shall glide by many a town
Of note; and where the Mississippi stream
By forests shaded now runs weeping on
Nations shall grow and states not less in fame
Than Greece and Rome of old.

.....
Hoarse Niagara's stream now roaring on,
By some great monarch taught a better course
Or cleared of cataracts, shall flow beneath
Unnumbered boats and merchandise and men.

⁴² "Minutes of the Convention of Delegates from the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and from the Associations of Connecticut," Hartford, 1843, reprinted in *Records of the Presbyterian Church*. Philadelphia, 1904. Also see A. L. Cross, "Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies," New York, 1902, *Harvard Historical Studies*, vol. IX.

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The fact that not all their dreams came true is no reflection on the authors' poetic skill, and the long poem they jointly wrote on this occasion rises more than once to considerable heights of excellence. Brackenridge and Freneau were leaders of a group of writers in college of whom the American reading public was to hear a good deal before many years elapsed.⁴³

There would seem to be nothing in the lines just quoted—and they are typical—that should have hurt British feelings. They were simply a poetic example of the new Americanism of the day, or at worst a somewhat fantastic expression of young America's enthusiastic outlook on her own future. Dr. Witherspoon was not blind to his responsibility as governor of a miscellaneous body of spirited young Americans, and he kept judicious check on all their proceedings.

There are now under my care, he wrote in 1772 to a member of the British aristocracy, many who in a very short time will be at the head of affairs in their several provinces, and I have already and shall continue to temper the spirit of liberty, which breathes high in their country, with just sentiments, not only of loyalty to our excellent sovereign, in which they do not seem to be defective, but with a love of order and an aversion to that outrage and sedition into which the spirit of liberty when not reined is sometimes apt to degenerate.

But the commencement productions of his undergraduates were being taken very seriously by some and at commencement in 1772, the orations cut deeply. In the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* of October 31, they are particularly criticised by "A Friend to Impartiality." Attending commencement he

with many others, was surprised to hear most of the young Gentlemen discussing in their performances the most perplexing political topics. The most difficult and knotty questions, relating to the British constitution, were solved in a jerk. . . . I could almost have persuaded myself that I was within a circle of vociferous politicians at Will's

⁴³ It was to Brackenridge that the President made his famous reply when the young student on entering college referred to his previous hardships and quoted Juvenal's lines—

*Haud facile emergunt quorum virtutibus obstat
Res angusta domi.*

"There you are wrong, young man!" retorted the President, "it is only your *res angusta domi* men that do emerge!"

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coffee-house, instead of being surrounded with the meek disciples of wisdom in the calm shades of academic retirement.⁴⁴

The Reverend Jonathan Boucher, who had reason for being critical of Dr. Witherspoon, made caustic comment on the college oratory of the time as exhibited at Princeton and at the University of Pennsylvania.⁴⁵ He considered these two institutions the chief nurseries of "all that frivolous and mischievous kind of knowledge which passed for learning in America at this period." They pretended to teach everything without being really competent to teach anything as it ought to be taught; but their chief and peculiar merit was thought to be in rhetoric and belles lettres, a term not easily defined, he says, nor understood; hence in no country were there so many orators, nor so many smatterers; two or three years spent at one of these seminaries were in general deemed sufficient to qualify a person for the gown, and persons so qualified had "pretty generally gotten the churches."⁴⁶ A style of oratory not very unlike Princeton's might probably have been heard on one or two other commencement platforms of that day; but the special Princeton brand aroused bitter resentment on more than one occasion during Dr. Witherspoon's presidency. That he himself did not altogether approve of the undergraduate style on the rostrum seems clear from a remark in his *Lectures on Eloquence*:

I believe, he says, it would be a great improvement of the laudable practice in this college of daily orations, if they were chosen with more judgment, and better suited to the performers. Almost all of the pieces we have delivered to us are of the last or highest kind, warm passionate declamations. It is no wonder that some should perform these ill, who have never tried the plainer manner of simple narrative.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXVIII, p. 277.

⁴⁵ *Notes and Queries*, 5 ser. vol. VI, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Mr. Boucher adds: "The two colleges of Princeton and Philadelphia manufacture physicians also with great facility." Princeton has never had a department of medicine nor conferred a medical degree. So that half of the reverend critic's slur has no basis of fact. As for the "facility" with which physicians were "manufactured" at the University of Pennsylvania, it can hardly be necessary to do more in refutation of the slander than to point to the brilliant and eminent record of that University's medical school from its earliest day to the present.

⁴⁷ *Works*, vol. III, p. 389.

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By the close of 1772 the President was receiving a full measure of criticism, and for a publication of his own. He had made another of his southern tours in the autumn of 1771 but his campaigns were now no longer to be limited to the mainland. The college had eighty-five students and forty-five grammar scholars, according to the New Jersey census return in 1772, but the President was casting his eyes longingly on the West Indies as a field for exploitation and when early in 1772 it was represented to the board of trustees that there was fair prospect of collecting money and securing students from the West Indies he was requested to make a tour of the islands. His son James, a graduate of the class of 1770, was planning to go to the Barbadoes and the board commissioned him to receive funds there for the College, and in Antigua or any other of the West Indies. It was thought advisable to appoint an agent to act with the President and this task fell very naturally to the Reverend Charles Beatty, whose early experience as a peddler seems to have developed a talent for money-getting equalled by the natural ability in this direction of the President himself and of the Reverend Mr. James Caldwell. Armed then with credentials from Governor Penn of Pennsylvania and Governor Franklin of New Jersey, Mr. Beatty proceeded to the Barbadoes; but there unfortunately he died before he had made any collections. Dr. Witherspoon never made the trip and whether his son visited the islands is not known. A committee appointed to carry out the project never made a report of its activities, although a number of West Indian students came to Princeton during the end of the eighteenth century.

The President had prepared the way for Mr. Beatty by writing in March, 1772, as a campaign document, an *Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica and the other West Indian Islands* which was reprinted in October in the newspapers. It was a frank but modest advertisement, an address on behalf of the College. Its preparation arose, says its author, from necessity, not choice; it was against his general method to advertise in print. Exactly how he classed his notices in the newspapers is not quite clear; modern business experts would call them at least excellent "publicity," which is the offspring, if not twin brother, of "advertising." But President Witherspoon says he preferred what he

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called "private application," and wanted West Indian boys for his school and College. He does not add that he needed West Indian money for his professorships. He claims it is an advantage to West Indian parents to have it in their power to send their sons to approved educational institutions in America for their elementary training rather than to Great Britain. Obviously, such institutions were nearer than those of Great Britain and yet sufficiently distant to remove temptation of running home and lurking in idleness; the climate is better suited to West Indians than that of Great Britain; for the better prosecution of their studies and the better preservation of their morals it is also wiser to send West Indians to America than to Europe, the discipline being firmer, the supervision closer, and a more personal contact with the professors being customary.

Turning then to the College of New Jersey he refers with great restraint to its situation and especial advantages, briefly describing the course of study and the equipment, mentioning the system of prizes which he had inaugurated and devoting a short paragraph to the grammar school. Finally he lays before his readers certain fundamental characteristics of the College which in his opinion should enlist for it the interest of thinking men—its independence of governmental influences, the consequent spirit of liberty that permeates its atmosphere; the esteem it enjoys from those who are nearest to it and therefore know it best; the character of its graduates; its location in a spot "most happily chosen for the health, the studies and the morals of its scholars;" its religious catholicity—every question as to form of church government is so thoroughly avoided that students have been graduated whose denomination he did not know, the whole aim of the College being to make them "good men and good scholars."

The republication of this document in the newspapers called forth at least two severe anonymous rejoinders, one in the shape of a letter to the *New York Gazette* of December 7, 1772⁴⁸ signed by "Causidicus," evidently a King's College sympathizer, the other a pamphlet printed in Philadelphia that winter entitled *Candid Remarks on Dr. Witherspoon's Address to the Inhabitants*

⁴⁸ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser, vol. XXVIII, p. 345.

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of *Jamaica, and the other West-India Islands*, and commonly said to have been written by the Reverend Thomas B. Chandler of Elizabeth-town.

"Causidicus" gives the President some pretty keen thrusts. He enquires why an address originally intended for West Indians should be obtruded on American readers? Obviously because "the Youth of North America were to be lured by the Charmer's Voice into the Bosom of Nassau-Hall" at the expense of other colleges. As for the alleged independence of Nassau Hall, "turbulence and faction ever have, and probably ever will mark" the proceedings of independents, witness the reign of Charles I and the recent happenings at Boston. The claim that the College of New Jersey is free from political and family influences is a slur directed at King's College in New York; the President's assertion that the spirit of liberty is strong at Princeton is unnecessary, the students in their public exhibitions having dwelt on British politics to such an extent "and in such a Manner, as to give the Greatest Offence to many who were present;" this spirit of liberty deserves a worse name, and in using such an argument the President is playing *ad populum*. He catches Dr. Witherspoon in a slip as to the Princeton enrolment compared with that at other colleges south of New England; he objects to the boast about the prominence of Witherspoon's graduates; he objects to the claims for Princeton's healthfulness; and in conclusion he raises the old and still unsettled question of urban versus rural colleges, proving at least to his own satisfaction that the argument is all in favor of the former.

Dr. Witherspoon replied in the *New York Gazette* of December 28⁴⁹ that an anonymous critic deserved no notice, but two of the points made by "Causidicus" he could not let pass unanswered. Therefore he would say first that he had no intention whatever of attacking other colleges in America; he had pleaded the cause of American colleges in general in the principal part of his *Address* and because he had mentioned circumstances deemed by him favorable to Princeton was no reflection, even by implication, on others. Secondly, he had no family in view nor any col-

⁴⁹ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser, vol. XXVIII, p. 369.

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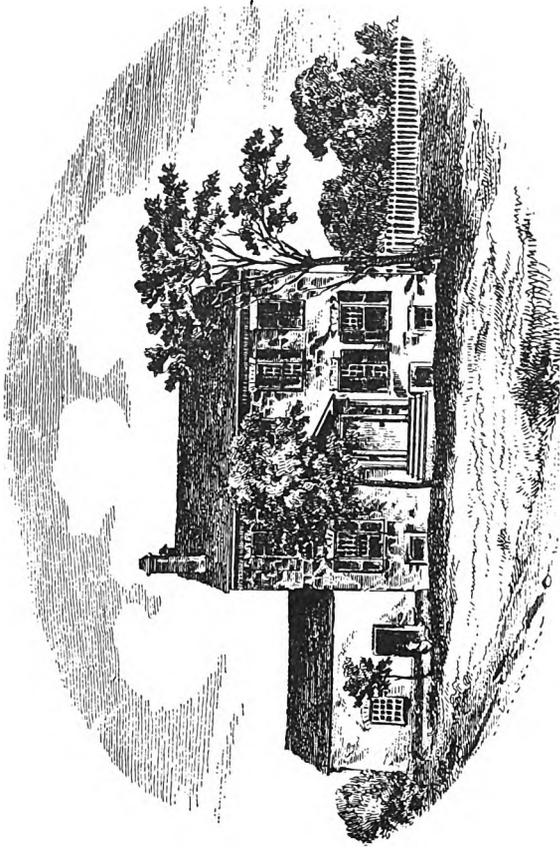
lege, when he said that Princeton was free of political ties and family influences. If King's College were controlled by one family it was news to him.

The author of *Candid Remarks* has much the same sort of criticism to make of the *Address*. Scarcely was the design of applying to the West Indies in favor of the college at Philadelphia known "but the Partizans of that at Princeton summoned up their Strength for an attempt of the Same Nature." He admires the "Sagacity and Fertility of Invention" of the President in discovering so many excellencies in the College of New Jersey unknown to others; and he warns the public against imposition. The *Address* has an air of caution and reserve "remote from the easy openness of Honesty." It is sophistry to say that it is better for West Indians to go to American institutions for their elementary and collegiate training than to Great Britain; the academies of Great Britain have advantages not mentioned and the faculties of the British universities are larger and better and have finer equipments at their disposal. He sees in the pamphlet a veiled attack on other American colleges, and in particular the college at Philadelphia and King's College at New York.

Dr. Witherspoon does not seem to have issued a reply to *Candid Remarks*. He could only have repeated the substance of his answer to Causidicus.⁵⁰

College duties, academic polemics, and synodical committees had not been enough to keep the President fully occupied. He had found time to cultivate one of his hobbies and having bought a piece of property on the range of wooded highland a mile north of Princeton, had taken up what he was pleased to call scientific gardening and farming. Thus it was that one summer afternoon in 1772 the itinerant missionary David McClure found him with several of his students reaping in his fields. It appears from a news item in the *Pennsylvania Journal* of February 13, 1772, that the farmhouse on this property had been burned earlier in the year, and probably on its site Dr. Witherspoon built himself

⁵⁰In the *New York Gazette* of January 18, 1773, "Causidico Mastix" prints a "Complete Vindication of a late Apologetical Letter from Princeton," poking fun of a very labored sort at both Causidicus and the President. *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser, vol. XXVIII, p. 394.



RES. OF JOHN WITHERSPOON
Mercer Co NJ

TUSCULUM

From an old print

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the substantial stone residence which he named "Tusculum"—"a small but neat house, in a pleasant retired situation surrounded with woods, in all the simple majesty of their uncultivated state,"⁵¹ a description which is one of the rare hints of nature appreciation to be found in his writings. The house, in excellent preservation, is still standing and bears the date 1773 cut in one of the stones of its massive front wall. He had built the house as part of his "scheme of improvement" and with no idea of occupying it himself just yet but of retiring thither when his working days were over. In August, 1773, the *Pennsylvania Journal* advertises for rent "Tusculum," then but lately finished—"within one mile, and in full view of the front of the College."⁵²

It was for joy at rain sadly needed by his "Tusculum" crops that he at times went through his various tasks "praising, returning thanks, and singing about it," much to the secret amusement of his undergraduates; and on such days, according to Fithian, even the hymns he chose for college vespers were ones that had reference, in Mr. Isaac Watts' inimitable words, to "Those wand'ring cisterns in the sky—Borne by the winds around." He rather fancied himself as a scientific farmer, and especially as a truck farmer; but his horticulture was purely utilitarian: vegetables he delighted to raise, but never a flower. He made this clear to a lady who was visiting "Tusculum." "Why Doctor," she is said to have exclaimed, "you have no flowers in

⁵¹ "The Druid," *Works*. vol. IV., p. 148

⁵² "To be Let and entered on immediately at Tusculum, within one mile, and in full view, of the front of the College at Princeton, New Jersey:

"A neat and elegantly finished house, two stories high, with four rooms on each floor, besides a garret above, and cellars conveniently divided below the whole house. It will be very proper for any family who choose to reside for sometime in that agreeable country, for health or pleasure, or who desire to have the education of their children carried on under their own eye. As much garden ground as is necessary, or as may be desired, will be let with the house; and cows for a family or horses for a carriage will be kept winter and summer at a reasonable price; but the Proprietor being fond of agriculture and engag'd in a scheme of improvement, will not let any of the lands for tillage. It is supposed there are persons to whom these circumstances will render it the more agreeable, as they may have country accommodation without care, and may make their residence long or short with little or no inconvenience." Dr. Witherspoon's name does not appear; likely prospective tenants are referred to "the Proprietor on the spot," or to John Bayard, or Dr. William Shippen, Jr., at Philadelphia. *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser, vol. XXVIII, p. 597.



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your garden!" "No, Madam," he replied, "No flowers in my garden, nor in my discourses either!"

He also found time to continue his active interest in the subject of Scottish emigration, and to preach charity sermons at which collections were taken for Scottish immigrants—e.g., in January, 1774, at the Old Presbyterian Church in New York when the sum of £70 was gathered.⁵³ He was never too busy to talk things over with a Scotsman just landed and in need of advice. On his arrival in America he had joined the St. Andrews Society of Philadelphia, a benevolent organization founded in 1749 for the purpose of assisting Scottish immigrants.⁵⁴ One of the first he was able to help was a former parishioner Alexander

⁵³ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXIX, p. 199.

⁵⁴ This is as suitable a point as any other to note that President Witherspoon is said to have been a Mason. It has proved impossible to verify the assertion and its source is untrustworthy. In an address on *Masonry in Rutland* delivered at West Rutland, Vermont, in 1879, and published at Rutland that year, the Honorable Henry Clark stated that Dr. Witherspoon was "at one time master of Alexandria Lodge, No. 1, in Virginia, over which George Washington afterwards presided." The records of Alexandria Lodge, however, fail to disclose the fact that the President was ever a member. Mr. Clark proceeded to tell of a visit to Ryegate made by the President in May, 1774 which extended until July. "He preached in Ryegate and Barnet, and baptized some children. In an extract from his diary furnished me by the late honored and venerable John Dove, Grand Secretary of Virginia, Dr. Witherspoon says: "I have been on a visit to my possessions . . . in the town of Ryegate, and there I convened my Masonic brethren in informal Lodge and held a delightful reunion." Then follows a list of those present. Mr. Clark quoted a further passage from the alleged diary: "June 24, 1782. My Masonic brethren assembled at the tavern, and without working tools or aprons marched to the Presbyterian Church where I endeavored to portray the tenets of the Masonic order as exemplified in the life of our great patron, St. John the Baptist. The Masons marched back to the tavern where we all sat down to dinner." No biographer of the President speaks of him as a Mason. The diary referred to is not mentioned elsewhere unless it be the memorandum book Dr. Green and Dr. J. W. Alexander speak of, and now lost. It is possible but improbable that the President absented himself from his college duties for several weeks in May and June, 1774. As for the list of Masons alleged to have been present, Miller and Wells (*History of Ryegate*, p. 224) call attention to the fact that several of the persons named had not yet settled in Ryegate and that at least two were not yet born. As for the alleged visit in June, 1782, aside from the fact that there was no Presbyterian Church in Ryegate at this time, it will appear in a later chapter that on the twelfth of that month President Witherspoon entered upon his last term of service in Congress, and that on the twenty-fifth the *Journal of Congress* records him as present and voting at Philadelphia. The aeroplane was not yet invented that might have brought him from Ryegate after dinner on June 24 in time to take part in a debate at Philadelphia on June 25.

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Thomson, whom he had left tenant in the vicinity of Paisley but who, with his family and the courage of his convictions, had sailed from Scotland to seek better fortune in the new world, and as soon as possible after landing at Boston had made his way to Princeton with letters to Dr. Witherspoon. The latter had started on one of his expeditions to Virginia, but at Philadelphia his fellow countryman caught him and received hearty welcome, with plenty of sound advice—all that he wanted just then. Mr. Thomson's ultimate success may be surmised from the enthusiastic picture of America in the pamphlet *News from America* issued later under his name in Glasgow, and already alluded to in this chapter.

It was with the same unfailing interest in the welfare of his own people that he allowed himself in 1772 to be pressed into a scheme organized by a Glasgow (and Greenock) merchant, John Pagan, for settling land in Nova Scotia with Scottish families.⁶⁵ What Dr. Witherspoon's original share in the grant was is not now known, but in 1792 he still held approximately twelve thousand acres. He had consented to the use of his name on condition that no land should be sold at a higher price than he should direct, and Mr. Pagan accordingly inserted his notices in the Edinburgh papers. The scheme was an interesting one. The land was on the Gulf of St. Lawrence about seventy miles from Halifax, with a coast line of some twenty miles, and bounded on two sides by navigable rivers. To the first twenty families going out the company promised to grant in fee simple, at sixpence sterling per acre, one hundred and fifty acres to each man and wife, and fifty acres more to each additional member of the family. To the second twenty families the rate was to be a shilling an acre, to the third eighteen pence, purchase money in all cases to be

⁶⁵ The grant had been made in 1765 to a group of men, chiefly residents of Philadelphia, the Reverend James Lyon (1759) heading the list and having associated with him some fourteen others among whom were Mr. Richard Stockton, Judge George Bryan and Colonel John Bayard, trustees of the College, Jonathan Smith (probably the graduate of 1760) and Andrew Hodge, the Philadelphia merchant. This group was known as the Philadelphia Company and their grant, the Philadelphia Grant. The project failed of immediate success because misrepresentation kept prospective settlers away, and in a year or two seven of the original fifteen disposed of their shares. It was these that were obtained by Dr. Witherspoon and Mr. Pagan. (See George Patterson, *History of the County of Pictou, N.S.*, Pictou, 1916.)

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payable two years after settling. Transportation at three pounds five shillings was to be supplied by Pagan, children from two to eight at halfprice, and younger children free. The land was no wilderness, twenty families were already on it, and a school of thirty pupils was already running; the proprietors intended asking the Governor of Nova Scotia to grant a charter for a Presbyterian church and offered to give five hundred acres to the first minister who would settle there and one hundred to the first schoolmaster—of itself a significant indication of comparative values.

The scheme was criticised seriously or ironically in most of the Scottish newspapers. One writer mistook the purchase money for yearly rent, another exaggerated the coldness of the climate and the wildness of the country, and many other criticisms were equally unjust. The letter of a "Well wisher to old Scotland" in the *Edinburgh Advocate* was typical of the general objections to the scheme; but the "Bystander" in the *Caledonian Mercury* pointed out that a great part of Nova Scotia would not be more disagreeable to Scottish constitutions than Canada was to the French; and Frenchmen who had emigrated seemed to be living in comfort, if their letters home were to be trusted. The decriers of the scheme had suggested no alternative for poor farmers and mechanics, the weavers and tanners who were out of work or ruined, and "Bystander" suggests that men should rather inquire into the causes of the spirit of emigration than criticise plans to help the poor to better themselves, and he darkly hints that it is the old clerical party antagonism that is casting cold water on the plan because Witherspoon's name is attached to it. The President himself replied to his critics in a letter to the *Scots Magazine*, which that journal, however, did not print.

He was more personally interested in a tract of land in the province of New York. In September, 1763, Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire had granted to a group of proprietors the township of Ryegate consisting of somewhat over twenty thousand acres situated on the Connecticut River in what was to become Caledonia county, Vermont. These men in 1767 conveyed their holdings for a thousand pounds to one John Church of Charlestown, New Hampshire, who prior to 1773 sold the

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southern half of the township to Dr. Witherspoon, John Pagan and his brother. In February, 1772, a company was formed in Renfrewshire, called the Scotch-American Company, of one hundred and forty members, most of them farmers anxious to emigrate. Articles of association being adopted in February, 1773, James Whistler, a surveyor, and David Allen were commissioned to go to America and buy land for the company. Reaching Philadelphia they ran across Dr. Witherspoon and learned that he would sell his Ryegate tract. They spent five months exploring lands in the north and south and finally returned to Princeton to bargain with the President. The sale, at three shillings New York money per acre, was concluded in October and in the spring of 1774 a party of immigrants arrived.⁶⁶ Dr. Witherspoon's influence in the early years of Ryegate's history is believed to have been a large contributor to the sober and patriotic character of the community. He is said to have urged among the Scottish settlers by letter, by visit, and by addresses, the advantages of independence when the cause of the colonies was under discussion. He visited Ryegate himself more than once, on each occasion

⁶⁶The subsequent history of the colony may be followed in the monumental *History of Ryegate, Vermont*, St. Johnsbury, Vermont, 1913, by Mr. Edward Miller and by Judge Frederic P. Wells. The main facts of the Witherspoon association seem to be that, having sold the southern division of the township to the Scotch-American Company in 1773, he purchased in 1774 a tract of 600 acres in the northwestern corner of the township for his son James and in 1776 2760 acres more in the same section. Soon after, his Nova Scotia associate John Pagan bought 5000 acres adjoining. In 1787 Dr. Witherspoon sold the tract bought for his son James to the Reverend Alexander Simpson of Pittenween, Scotland, whose widow eleven years later sold it to James and Abraham Whitehill of Renfrewshire, two brothers who became the ancestors of the well-known Vermont family of that name. In 1793 the President exchanged his 12,000 acres in Nova Scotia for part, and purchased the rest, of the Pagan holdings in Vermont (the deed is filed in the Office of the Register of Deeds, Pictou, N. S.), and later that year disposed of all this property to the New York merchants, Robert Hunter and William Neilson.

The Pennsylvania Historical Society owns a letter of President Witherspoon dated August 28, 1781, to Robert Donald, merchant in Petersburg, Va., and a friend of Pagan, from which it appears that, the latter having fallen upon evil days, the President suggested that he come to America and be admitted to citizenship; he wishes to know more of his situation because of their former partnership; Pagan is likely to lose his Ryegate property by confiscation as a British subject just as he himself is in danger of losing his Nova Scotia lands for a similar reason. This situation probably explains the exchange and purchase of 1793.

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preaching and baptizing, and his son James was settled in the northern part of the township for nearly two years.

These transactions have laid the President under more or less severe criticism for what have been called his land speculations. His friend Dr. Stiles, for instance, after noting in his journal on hearsay that the settlers on Dr. Witherspoon's Nova Scotia tract were to occupy and cultivate it for eight years without rent and then were to receive leases from him at sixpence per acre, continues in a lightning calculation as follows:

Allow 2 or 3000 Acres for useless Land & Highways—Raise 6*d* on 20 Thousand Acres gives a Rental of £5000 ster. annum. The Doctor seems to be taking Care for this World as well as for that which is to come. Is he not laying a foundation for the Ruin of some of his Children and Posterity!

And the late President Maclean in his *History of the College of New Jersey* labored under the similar impression that his distinguished predecessor's interest in Vermont was one of personal gain. Passing over the fact that both of these critics are in error as to details, the main contention that Dr. Witherspoon was a speculator is unfair if any credence whatever is to be given to his own statement. "My having any concern in such an extensive undertaking," he says in his "Letter" to the *Scots Magazine*, "was wholly accidental and unexpected. I was invited and pressed to it, from a motive that was not at all concealed, that it would give the people who intended to come out, greater confidence that they should meet with fair treatment." His aim was to assist as far as he might in alleviating the lot of at least some of his suffering fellow-countrymen. His method was one that would certainly bring about that end at the least cost and peril to the emigrants concerned. It is admitted that he gained nothing financially in the outcome, though to say that he anticipated serious loss is to deny him ordinary common sense. So far as he was concerned his plan was no moneymaking scheme, but rather an eleemosynary enterprise on business principles; and for him at least it was a failure. It is reasonably sure that those who knew him best and understood his motives thought none the less highly of him for his benevolent efforts, and as evidence of the

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confidence in which he was viewed by his clerical colleagues it may be pointed out that at the meeting of the Synod in 1773 he was elected its treasurer.

The "Letter" to the *Scots Magazine* is more than a reply to the attack on him for supporting Pagan's scheme; it is an essay on emigration, and illustrates not only the alertness of Dr. Wither-
spoon's observation of conditions as he travelled through the Colonies and the speed of his assimilation of new data, but also the new note—the economic—that permeated so much of his writing after he came to America. This had never appeared in his writings of the Scottish period. Perhaps necessarily so, since all his writing had been theological; yet if he had devoted much study in Scotland to economic questions it is strange that no reflection of that study is found even in his occasional sermons. Once across the Atlantic, however, his essays are strongly marked by his new angle of approach.

In the "Letter" in question he points out that the accusation against him may be reduced to the following argument—emigration from Britain to America is not only hurtful but tends to the ruin of the kingdom, therefore by inviting people to leave Scotland and settle in America he is an enemy of his country. In reply he declares that there is little ground for alarm at migration from Britain to America. The numbers are not of consequence. Any one who reads Montesquieu will know that "when the spirit and principle of a constitution are good, occasional migration, and even war, famine, and pestilence are hardly felt after a little time. The place of those who are removed is speedily filled. Two or three hundred families going abroad make a great noise, but it is nothing at all to the people in Great Britain and will but make way for the settlement and provision of those who stay behind, and occasion them to marry and multiply the faster."

It is probable that the people in Britain imagine that the new settlements in America are wholly filled by those who come from Europe—it is far otherwise. They do not make the fortieth part in any new settlement. Such tracts are peopled from the adjacent settlements at first, with a few stranger emigrants; but their chief increase is from natural generation. . . . America is certainly exhibiting at this time a scene that is new in the history of man-

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kind. It increases in a proportion that no political calculations have yet been able to understand or lay down rules for. The reason of this he thinks is that where colonies were sent out in ancient times, the people and the soil were somewhat similar, and improved by slow degrees; but in America one saw a wild but noble soil taken possession of by all the power, wealth, and learning of Europe, which pushed on its improvement with a rapidity which is inconceivable. Moreover, it should be remembered that "the migration is not all one way." It is said that New England has sent back to England twice as many people as ever came out of it to that section, but with this difference—they commonly come out poor; they go back rich.

But, he proceeds, supposing (what I do not believe) that inviting people over from Scotland to America did tend in some degree to depopulate that part of the world, should a man who does so be called an enemy to his country? What is it for a man to be a friend to his country? Is it to wish well to the stones and the earth, or the people who inhabit it? Can he be an enemy to them by pointing out to such of them as are poor or oppressed, where they may have a happy and plentiful provision, and their posterity be multiplied as the sand of the sea? . . . Is he then the enemy of those who stay behind? Not surely of the multitude, or common people, for there will be but more room made for them, and the more easy access to a comfortable subsistence.

It remains then, that he must be the enemy of the landholders, who may run some risk of being obliged to lower their rents. But is this a liberal way of thinking, to say a man is an enemy to his country, while he promotes the happiness of the great body of the people with a small diminution of the interest of a handful? . . .

I cannot help thinking it is doing a real service to my country, when I show that those of them who find it difficult to subsist on the soil in which they were born, may easily transport themselves to a soil and climate vastly superior to that. Sobriety and industry cannot fail to be attended by independence and abundance. . . .

But after all, I can never admit that the happiness of one class of man depends upon the misery of another, or that it can be any way contrary to the interest of the landholders in Scotland, that a few who find themselves pinched in their circumstances, or who have an active and enterprising disposition should remove to America. . . . I have not said in any part of the above discourse, nor do I believe that there

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is any hardheartedness or disposition to oppress in the landlords of Scotland. . . . The rise of lands has been the consequence of an increase of trade and wealth, and the disposition to go abroad in the common people, at present is owing to the same cause that made clerks and supercargoes go out, for these fifty years past, viz., the hopes of bettering their circumstances. It is both unjust and impossible to hinder them, if they be so minded.⁵⁷ . . . For my own part . . . since Providence has sent me to this part of the world, and since so much honour has been done me as to suppose that my character might be some security against fraud and imposition, I shall certainly look upon it as my duty to do every real service in my power, to such of my countrymen as shall fall in my way, and shall either desire or seem to need my assistance.⁵⁸

Dr. Witherspoon's opinions on colonial politics at this time, though expressed only in private, were approved. After the President's visit to New Haven in the autumn of 1773 to attend the Yale commencement Ezra Stiles makes an interesting comparative statement in his journal that President Locke of Harvard was the most learned of American college executives, excepting Witherspoon in theology; but Locke he asserts would make no stand in politics either for or against the liberty of his country, but rather would "divert himself with the Folly of those who [were] most venturesome & enterprising on both sides." Dr. Stiles was thinking still of Witherspoon when he thus characterized by contrast the President of Harvard. For one reason or another, with the exception of Dr. Witherspoon, the presidents of the American colleges were not distinguished in the history of the Revolution; but there was to be no doubt as to the position of the President of the College of New Jersey on the questions of the day. He was not to linger on the political fence as one President did, nor like another try to flee from the storm, nor yet like a third had he secret longings for British ecclesiastical prefer-

⁵⁷ The author of the *Candid Enquiry into the Causes of the Migration from Scotland*, already quoted, points out that emigration from Scotland was not new, but the migration of so many farmers and laborers was new. This had not arisen because of over population—one-fifth of Scotland was not under cultivation and one-half was still in a state of nature, so that strangers wondered at its wildness. Nor was migration due to persecution, or fanaticism, or on religious accounts; it was due simply to the land monopoly, which rendered the condition of the lower classes hopelessly unhappy.

⁵⁸ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 287.

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ment to give complexion to his politics. His transformation into an American was almost complete, and the hour was fast approaching when he would be enabled to proclaim publicly the position he had already reached privately. Yet, since the Church under whose jurisdiction he had placed himself had not yet raised the ban of silence, as a clergyman he felt bound to respect the tacit convention that in general was keeping politics out of the pulpit.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNDERMINING COLONIAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW JERSEY

DURING the next eighteen months the royal government in New Jersey was undermined and at last overturned, a process in the final stages of which Dr. Witherspoon was to have no small share. By the time he got back to Princeton after his visit to New Haven in the autumn of 1773, a crisis on the tea question was at hand. The October and November meetings at Boston, and the historic Tea Party of December, the fate of the tea consignments at Charlestown and of the tea ships at Philadelphia and New York were incidents which could scarcely have been unheeded by the enthusiastic young gentlemen under his care at Nassau Hall; and there is evidence that the atmosphere of the campus had been growing more and more uncomfortable for stray Tory collegians. One student, whose gentle character in maturer years would not lead us to suspect so much bitterness in his youth, speaks of loyalist undergraduates as "possessed swine" and hopes that when Dr. Witherspoon gets back from New England he will have two or three of them "turned off."¹ Whether the wish became father of the deed, and a steep place going down into the sea was found for these Gadarenes, we are not told. It is quite probable that the college pump was called into requisition, anticipating Civil War days in the next century when the same expedient figured in a very similar episode. The attitude of the campus on the burning question of the day was plainly revealed in the following January (1774) when one fine evening in order "to show our patriotism," says the undergraduate chronicler of the incident, "we gathered all the Steward's Winter Store of Tea, and all the Students had in College and having made a fire in the Campus we there burnt near a dozen pound, tolled the bell, and made many spirited resolves." And in the centre of the bonfire

¹ Andrew Hunter to P. V. Fithian, September 6, 1773, Fithian's *Journal and Letters*, p. 42.

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was propped an effigy of Governor Hutchinson of Massachusetts, "having a Tea cannister tyed about his Neck."²

Dr. Witherspoon and his tutors took no more serious view of this frolic than they had of the bonfire of 1770; but a trustee with a stricter sense for law and order, supposed to have been Mr. Richard Stockton of Princeton, with whose share in persuading Dr. Witherspoon to come to Princeton the reader is familiar, endeavored to stop what he considered riotous and dangerous proceedings, and with more emphasis than elegance was urged by one of the ringleaders, Samuel Leake by name, to go about his business. At the next meeting of the board of trustees when the President read for the trustees' approval the faculty list of commencement honors, Leake's name on the ground of scholarship led all the rest. Thereupon, it being reported to the board that he had been "singularly active in encouraging and promoting some unwarrantable and riotous proceedings among the students," particularly in burning the effigy of Governor Hutchinson and also insulting a member of the board, his proposed appointment to the first honor at commencement was highly disapproved and peremptorily vetoed. A trivial incident perhaps, but showing that the campus was naturally a little ahead of its elders.

As for the province at large, it was beginning to reveal clearly drawn party lines, although having been held so long under the thumb of the Crown administration it could hardly be expected to kindle save slowly to the general cause. During the summer of 1774, however, a distinct change might have been noticed stealing over the spirit of the Colony. Governor Franklin writing on May 31 to the Earl of Dartmouth³ thought it doubtful if the proposed September congress of colonial representatives would be

² Charles C. Beatty to Enoch Green, Nassau Hall, January 31, 1774, Library of Princeton University. A few days later the *Pennsylvania Journal* of February 16, 1774, remarked editorially: "We hear from Princeton in New Jersey that the Officers and Students of the College have unanimously agreed to drink no more Tea." Mr. Woods in his biography of the President assumes (p. 117) that the Princeton "Tea Party" was the direct response of the campus to news brought from Boston by Paul Revere in December, 1773, to Burlington and Philadelphia, via Princeton. No record however, has been found showing that Revere came by way of Princeton. Further, the Princeton occasion took place late in January, 1774, and not at the time Revere would have stopped at Princeton.

³ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser., vol. X, p. 458.

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held. As to following the example of Virginia and appointing a committee to correspond with other Colonies he had hoped that New Jersey would not go into the measure and had taken some pains with several of the leading members of the Legislature for that purpose, and successfully so he had thought; for although the Assembly had met in November, 1773, and had been frequently urged to bring the question up it had not done so until its February session. And he doubts that it would have considered the matter even then had New York not resolved just before to appoint a committee of correspondence, and New Jersey did not care to "appear singular." The Governor told the assemblymen that the measure was "very absurd, if not unconstitutional;" but notwithstanding, on February 8, 1774, the Assembly had resolved without a dissenting vote to accept the invitation to an exchange of views with sister Colonies and had appointed a standing committee of correspondence and inquiry charged not only to communicate with other Colonies, but also to obtain the most early and authentic intelligence of all acts and resolutions of Parliament affecting the liberties and privileges of the Colonies, and to lay their proceedings from time to time before the House. No trace of the work of this committee is found until four months later. On June 1, the day the port of Boston was closed, six of the nine committeemen met at New Brunswick and sent a letter to the people of Boston stating that they regarded New Jersey as eventually in the same plight with Boston and pledging New Jersey to whatever steps should be agreed on; they further signed a request to the Governor to call a session of the Assembly before August. Governor Franklin informed his petitioners that there was no public business in the Colony to make such a session necessary, and officially he may have been speaking the truth; but privately, a little later, he intimated to the Earl of Dartmouth that affairs in the Colonies were perhaps "worthy of more Attention and Consideration than any Thing that has ever before concerned Great Britain."⁴

And indeed in New Jersey affairs were becoming decidedly worth attention, for through June and July scarcely a week

⁴*New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser., vol. X, p. 464. Letter of June 18, 1774 (misprinted "June 28").

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passed which did not bring news of the appointment of some fresh county committee of correspondence, and the fact that most of the public meetings that gave them birth, whatever individuals may have thought, still made a point of declaring their unswerving allegiance to the British Crown, did not make them any less worthy of notice. The first meeting of the kind, sounding a keynote for its successors, was held June 6 by the township of Lower Freehold in Monmouth County only a few miles from Princeton. A few days later (June 11) Essex County met at Newark and appointed the first county committee of correspondence in the province, to meet other county committees and choose delegates to the proposed continental congress in September, and it was suggested that the committees meet for this purpose July 21 at New Brunswick.⁵ Bergen and Morris counties were next to fall into line and on July 4 the freeholders and inhabitants of Somerset County met at Millstone, New Jersey, adopted resolutions and appointed a committee of nine members, among them Dr. Witherspoon, to correspond with other counties and to represent Somerset in electing delegates to the congress.⁶ We do not know what part Dr. Witherspoon took at the Millstone meeting. Including himself, five of the nine men forming the committee were Princeton citizens.

Writing on June 18 to the Earl of Dartmouth in the letter already mentioned, Governor Franklin had thought it seemed now determined by several of the leading men in most, if not all, the counties of the province to follow the lead of Essex, their aim seeming to be to bring about a congress of deputies from all the Colonies not only to apply to His Majesty for the repeal of the Boston Port Act, but to endeavor to adjust the differences between the mother country and her Colonies; he doubted, however, that New Jersey would agree to non-importation. But he was destined to be sadly disillusioned.

It was a representative body of seventy-two men from eleven

⁵*Provincial Congress Minutes.*

⁶*Pennsylvania Journal*, July 20, 1774. The report of the meeting is not in the Minutes of the Provincial Congress, but is reprinted in the *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* of October, 1916, vol. V, p. 242, and *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser., vol. XXIX, p. 425.

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of the thirteen counties of the province that met on July 21 at New Brunswick. Stephen Crane of Essex was elected president and Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant of Princeton, in Somerset County, was made secretary. The minutes of the meeting, or any account of the deliberations, are not known to be in existence. Mr. John Adams informs us, however, that Dr. Witherspoon and William Livingston labored with the convention to have it instruct its delegates to the congress not to pay for the tea, but the matter was not covered by the resolutions adopted and printed. These begin by declaring unswerving loyalty to the King and detestation of the thought of independence; they oppose taxation for revenue without representation as unconstitutional and oppressive; the Acts of Parliament relating to Boston and Massachusetts are characterized as subversive to the rights of American subjects and repugnant to the common principles of humanity and justice; to procure redress the best method is to appoint a general congress of commissioners from the Colonies, empowered to pledge each to the other the public honor and faith of the Colonies to adhere to the determinations of that congress; they recommend a non-importation and non-consumption agreement; they resolve to take collections for the immediate relief of sufferers at Boston and they extend their grateful acknowledgment to the "patrons of constitutional liberty" in Parliament who are endeavoring to avert the storm hanging over the Colonies and to support the "just rights of the King's subjects in America;" and finally they elect as delegates to the Continental Congress five representatives to unite with those of the other Colonies to obtain relief for an oppressed people and the redress of grievances.⁷ These resolutions are strongly reminiscent of the seven Somerset County resolutions, covering every one of them and in some cases adopting identical phraseology, thus giving color to the opinion that the Somerset committee headed by Dr. Witherspoon exercised a dominant influence at the New Brunswick meeting.

Whatever his share in the proceedings of the New Brunswick convention, he had very definite ideas of the importance of the approaching Continental Congress, and he went further than the

⁷ *Provincial Congress Minutes*, p. 25, and *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser., vol. X, p. 469.

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New Jersey resolves in an essay written that summer, entitled *Thoughts on American Liberty*.⁸ The Congress he declared was the representative of the great body of the people of America and was very different from the assemblies of the several provinces, different in mode of election, in purpose, and in term of service. It was, therefore, wrong for some of the Colonies to leave the election of representatives to the assemblies although in certain cases, as for instance Massachusetts and Virginia, there was identity of sentiment between the assemblies and the people at large.

As for the prerogatives of the Congress he was uncertain whether it would be safe, or even proper, to send ambassadors or to petition the King or the Parliament—the Congress might be treated as a disorderly and unconstitutional body, or indeed as criminal. It was certain that the Congress was very different from any regular operation of an approved constitution; “it is an interruption or a suspension of the usual forms,” he declared without much danger of contradiction, “and an appeal to the great law of reason, the first principles of the social union and the multitude collectively” for whose benefit all laws and customs in a constituted state are established. That the King and Parliament were resolved to force submission from the Colonies was proved by the repressive Acts. Therefore the great object of the approaching Congress should be to unite the Colonies and make them as one body in any measures of defence, to assure the people of Great Britain that the Colonies will not submit voluntarily, and to convince them that it will be either impossible or unprofitable to compel the Colonies by open violence. And to this end he submitted the following recommendations for the consideration of the Congress:

- (1) To profess loyalty to the King, and “our backwardness” to break connection with Great Britain, unless forced thereto;
- (2) To declare the firm resolve never to submit to the claims of Great Britain, but deliberately to prefer war with all its horrors, and even extermination, to slavery;
- (3) To resolve union and to pursue the same measures “until American liberty is settled on a solid basis,” and Massachusetts in particular is restored to its rights;

⁸ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 213.

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- (4) To resolve a non-importation and non-consumption agreement to be entered on immediately;
- (5) To take measures to promote industry and manufactures, such as granting premiums in different Colonies for manufactures, appointing public markets for materials, inviting foreign manufacture in every branch and appointing societies in each large city and especially in the seaports to direct and encourage emigrants, whether manufacturers or laborers, and to publish plans of this kind in the British newspapers;
- (6) To recommend to the legislature of each Colony to put the militia on the best footing and to urge all Americans to arm themselves "in case of a war with the Indians, French, or Roman Catholics, or in case they should be reduced to the hard necessity of defending themselves from murder and assassination;"
- (7) To draw up an address to the British army and navy reminding them of their character as Britons and of the reproach, and perhaps danger, that they will run if they allow themselves to be the instruments of enslaving their country;
- (8) To draw up a plan of union for all the Colonies so that as formerly they may correspond how best to cooperate in such measures as shall be necessary to their common defence.

This essay, Dr. Witherspoon's first known writing on the American controversy, marks the completion of his transformation into an American. He was now preparing to take an active part in public affairs. We have his own statement that he did not obtrude politics into his sermons and no published discourse of his at this time alludes in any way to the political crisis; his first printed sermon that can in any way be called political is the one on the *Dominion of Providence*, delivered nearly two years later. His appointment as a representative of the progressive element in the province shows, however, that he had not been silent in private and that the views he had thus expressed were favorable to the colonial cause and were well known at least to his immediate constituents. We have seen that, so far as any published words of his reveal it, he had come to America ignorant that a dispute still existed between the mother country and her Colonies. If he had brought any opinion with him it would have been in all probability that of the great middle class to which he belonged, who silently but doubtfully watched the trend of affairs.

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How his eyes were opened on his arrival has already been told. That the American point of view was new to him is indubitable, and that, even after he had grown to understand this point of view, he had never dreamt of independence as the unavoidable end to which the Colonies were drifting cannot be denied, if his oft-repeated statements to that effect are to be believed. Even in the essay just summarized, there is only the vaguest hint at independence; he had not yet reached the point of believing separation inevitable. But he had learned to appreciate the claim of the Americans that they could not submit "in all cases whatsoever to the decisions of a body of the sons of Adam so distant from them." He had heard this claim debated up and down the Colonies during the last six years, and he found himself driven at last into agreement with it. He had learned to realize that the Colonies had enjoyed privileges which had been of such long standing and by which they had so thrived that in his *Letter to Natives of Scotland in America*, written less than two years after the date we have now reached, he was to call them plainly "ancient rights." And the point at issue was that in her progressive imperial views Great Britain would no longer allow the Colonies to enjoy those "rights." Once more he was finding himself face to face with a struggle for personal liberty and popular government, a fight very similar to the old one in Scotland against patronage and privilege. In a sermon at Edinburgh in January, 1758, before the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, he had spoken of America as that distant country which "was a refuge to many of our pious forefathers, when flying from the rage of ecclesiastic tyranny,"⁹ and in the ordination sermon which he preached at Paisley in September of the same year he had pointed out that "the noble struggle which many in England made, about one-hundred years ago, for their liberties sacred and civil, still bears the name of the Grand Rebellion."¹⁰ These two passages indicate the historical source of his opinions in 1774. His language of 1758 was typical of the attitude toward liberty still held two decades later by colonial dissenting clergy. In the words of an American historian, "they were driven to it in defence of their rebel-

⁹ *Works*, vol. I, p. 284.

¹⁰ *Works*, vol. I, p. 326.

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lious Puritan ancestors."¹¹ The *Thoughts on American Liberty* show how far Dr. Witherspoon had advanced in six years. Still loyal to the King, he was nevertheless firmly resolved never to submit to British claims even though that resolution meant bloodshed, and therefore he was insistent that the Colonies put themselves in an attitude to defend their position; he was urgent that they enlarge their sources of supply and that they form a definite and effective union among themselves. Politically he had ceased to be a Briton; he was now an American, but with no sign of bitterness toward the other side. On the contrary he always spoke respectfully of the British government and of British institutions, and one may easily trace in his subsequent writings a tone of regret that separation between the mother country and her Colonies had to occur.

During the summer of 1774, the New England delegates to the Continental Congress came through Princeton on their way to Philadelphia, and few passed unhailed by the President of the College of New Jersey. Two at least have recorded their impressions. Mr. Silas Deane, who passed through on August 30, dismisses Witherspoon and his colleagues with the remark that they waited on his party, "but tutors and scholars are the same everywhere," so he finds it unnecessary to "enlarge" on the Princetonians who welcomed him. He was more impressed by the service he found at the tavern than by any sentiments of liberty he may have heard expressed in the village or on the campus.¹² Mr. John Adams was in a more appreciative frame of mind. He came two or three days before Mr. Deane, arriving on a Saturday and remaining until Monday. He devotes some pages of his diary to his experiences. Piloted by an undergraduate he explored village and College, and under the guidance of Professor William Churchill Houston, the future member of Congress and continental receiver of taxes for New Jersey, he looked over the library, glanced at the philosophical apparatus and waited politely while the professor endeavored to perform an electrical experiment for him. But the chapel bell rang for vespers before the machine could be cajoled into action, and science was compelled to

¹¹ Van Tyne in *American Historical Review*, vol. XIX, p. 50.

¹² *Connecticut Historical Society Collections*, vol. II, p. 164.

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yield to religion. The singing of the undergraduates was another disappointment—they sang “as badly as the Presbyterians of New York.” But after chapel Mr. Adams was introduced to Dr. Witherspoon, who escorted him up to the balcony of Nassau Hall to see the view and then down to his house at the corner of the campus to drink a glass of wine. And here the two men had long and free talk. Two points especially struck Mr. Adams. Convinced that British ignorance of the true basis of the American attitude was chiefly responsible for existing strained relations, President Witherspoon urged the advisability of subsidizing writers in the British newspapers, establishing what modern life would call a publicity bureau, to explain the American claims and to remove ignorant British prejudice, a note he struck again and again in his later writings and public utterances. And touching another of his favorite ideas the President further urged the formation in every Colony of a society for encouraging protestant immigration from Great Britain. He accompanied Mr. Adams back to the tavern under the sign of “Hudibras,” whose proprietor Jacob Hyer was soon to prove himself, with the rank of colonel, as warm a patriot as he was already popular a boniface. Mr. Adams spent Sunday listening to Dr. Witherspoon, “a clear sensible preacher,” and on Monday morning the future President of the United States continued his way to Philadelphia convinced that the head of the College of New Jersey was “as high a son of liberty as any man in America.”¹³

But like a war-horse scenting the fray that gentleman could not bear the strain of remaining at Princeton while the Congress of provincial deputies was assembling a scant fifty miles away. Stirring within him again was the blood of the ancient spearmen; it had led him to the field of Falkirk; it had made him the redoubtable champion of the Popular party in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and now it was calling him to Philadelphia. Moreover, he had views on the situation which he felt should be driven home in the minds of those who were meeting there. He could not stay away from a conference which he felt was to debate a national crisis. He had not turned American as one changes a coat,—without deep moral convictions. To

¹³ *Life and Works*, vol. II, p. 355.

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Philadelphia accordingly he went, and on Saturday morning, September 3, he might have been found at Dr. Edward Shippen's breakfast table, where although Colonel Richard Henry Lee seems to have done most of the talking, Dr. Witherspoon himself nevertheless entered "with great spirit into the American cause," and showed himself to be as heartily for that cause "as any of the natives," thereby strengthening Mr. Adams' impression gained at Princeton that this Scot was an "animated Son of Liberty." And that evening with Adams, Lee, and Harrison of Virginia, the two Rutledges, Dr. Shippen, Dr. Steptoe, and Robert Treat Paine, he was a guest at Mr. Thomas Mifflin's "elegant supper" at which the talk ran high and the company "drank sentiments till 11 o'clock." The following afternoon he preached in Dr. Sproat's church whither Mr. Silas Deane, in more genial mood, went to hear him. How long he remained and what else he did in Philadelphia we do not know. Had Mr. Adams been at the Princeton commencement a few days later he would have secured aural proof of the President's claims for his student's patriotic principles. The Latin salutatory, which Thomas H. MacCaule pronounced in place of the overzealous Samuel Leake, lost nothing of fervor by the change, since it had for its plain unequivocal subject the thesis "*Bellum servituti anteponendum.*" Leake himself could scarcely have chosen a more significant text. Another speaker harangued the audience on "Liberty," and a third on the "Horrors of War." The bellicose tone of the exercises was relieved by Hugh Brackenridge's "Poem on Divine Revelation," delivered as a Master's oration on taking that degree;¹⁴ and to the Commencement audience Dr. Witherspoon preached a special sermon at which a collection was taken for the Society for Relief of Widows and children of deceased Presbyterian Ministers.¹⁵ But it must be admitted that the campus was living up to its bellicose reputation.

Meanwhile all over the Province of New Jersey the movement toward the adoption of patriotic principles was slowly going forward. Essex County had led the way in calling the convention of

¹⁴ Advertised for sale by Samuel Loudon, Rivington's *New York Gazette*, November 17, 1774. *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXIX, p. 527.

¹⁵ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXIX, p. 474.

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July, and the grand jury of the county now took the occasion of a reply to Chief Justice Smyth's charge from the bench the first Tuesday in November, to express in unmistakable language the attitude of the community. The county lost little time in obeying the resolutions of the Articles of Association agreed to by the Continental Congress of September. In November a committee of observation was appointed and it was recommended that every county in the province do likewise, so that any citizen found violating the articles might be held up to public notice as unfriendly to the liberties of the country and all dealings with him broken off. At Elizabeth on December 1 the committee of correspondence and freeholders met, elected a fresh committee, resolved to petition the Assembly to appoint delegates to the next Continental Congress and then, adjourning to the front of the courthouse, publicly burned two recent pamphlets "calculated to sow the seeds of disunion among the good people of America." The new committee consisted of six members, three of whom were the Princeton trustees, William Peartree Smith, Elias Boudinot, and William Livingston. Elsewhere, men who failed to appear and answer charges of disloyalty to the cause were blacklisted; users of tea were reasoned with, or boycotted until they submitted to public opinion; criticism of the resolutions of the Congress was not tolerated, and publications of that color were given a coat of tar and buzzard's feathers and nailed to the pillory as monuments to "the indignation of a free and loyal people against the author and vendor of publications so evidently tending to subvert both the liberties of America and the Constitution of the British Empire." James Rivington, the New York printer, received especial attention, being branded "as a noxious exotick plant, incapable either of cultivation or improvement on this soil of freedom and only fit to be transported." And it was resolved to have nothing to do with him while he continued to retail such "dirty, scandalous, and traitorous performances." At Burlington, although a centre of Tory influence, a meeting of patriot freeholders and inhabitants was held at which the Articles of Association were approved and a committee of observation was appointed for the city and county. In this wave of feeling the opposition was almost lost sight of, but here and

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there it organized, put itself on record, and promptly got into trouble. Such was the fate of Shrewsbury and Staten Island whose inhabitants according to the Elizabeth committee were manifesting an unfriendly disposition to the liberties of America and had neglected to join the Association. Even in Bergen county's patriotic ointment there lurked a Tory fly. The town of Hackensack declared that petitions to the Throne were the only salutary means of removing grievances, disavowed all riotous mobs, refused to be concerned in any unconstitutional measures, resolved allegiance to the Crown and decided to support His Majesty's civil officers in all lawful proceedings. Opinion, however, differed in New Jersey as to what constituted lawful proceedings and what did not, and the seriousness of the outlook brooked no dallying. Therefore volunteers were being raised; men who knew the manual of arms were being hired to teach raw recruits; supplies of powder were being laid in; leaden clock and window weights and even family heirlooms of pewter were being run into bullets. The day after the news of Lexington and Concord reached New Jersey the Newark committee advised its constituents to give all possible support to Massachusetts, to drill their military companies at least once a week, to see that the men were properly equipped, and to request all heads of families and masters of prentices to encourage those of proper age to learn military exercises, and to allow them time to perfect themselves. At Freehold by March, 1775, companies had already been formed and the militia was making good progress.

In December, 1774, Somerset County had met on call of the committee of correspondence chosen in July and had unanimously approved the proceedings of the Continental Congress, elected a new committee of correspondence to serve until July, 1775, and instructed it to meet other county committees and appoint delegates from the province to the next Congress, if the assembly failed to do so. Dr. Witherspoon was one of the new committeemen.¹⁶

The provincial legislature was convened in regular session and the council in January, 1775, had returned a brief and perfunc-

¹⁶ *New York Gazette*, December 26, 1774, in *Somerset Historical Quarterly* vol. V, p. 244. *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. XXIX, p. 554.

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tory reply to the Governor's opening address, assuring him that with sincere loyalty to the King, they would endeavor to prevent those mischiefs which seemed to threaten, and by their zeal for the authority of government on the one hand and for the constitutional rights of the people on the other, would aim to restore the health in the body politic that every one desired. But there was a new note in the assembly's address, the note of new-found power although its protestations of loyalty seemed just as earnest. The proceedings of the Continental Congress of September were approved and the delegates from New Jersey were thanked for their faithful discharge of their duties, and were reappointed. This action was somewhat of a shock to Governor Franklin. He had hoped that the proceedings at Philadelphia would not be approved, and had in fact framed a paragraph of his speech to this end; but according to his account William Livingston, Mr. DeHart, and Mr. Elias Boudinot, three of the delegates, came down and lobbied for the resolution of approval; and by what the governor unluckily termed "artful management" succeeded in forcing a vote the very morning the resolution was made, although several members desired postponement for further consideration.¹⁷

Such was the general condition in New Jersey when the news of Lexington and Concord was carried across the province on the night of April 23, 1775. The rider reached Princeton from New Brunswick at six o'clock in the morning of the twenty-fourth; his dispatch was endorsed by Dr. Thomas Wiggins and Mr. Jonathan Baldwin of the local committee, one a trustee and the other the steward of the College, and was forwarded at once to Trenton and Philadelphia. By breakfast time its contents were known to the campus and throughout the village and neighborhood. A town meeting was at once called, of which Mr. Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant was made secretary, and from which emanated the first call for a provincial congress of New Jersey. Who were the leaders of this meeting is not known, but under the circumstances there can be no doubt that Dr. Witherspoon was not only present but took part in the proceedings. The following

¹⁷ *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser., vol. X, pp. 537, 575.

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copy of the call in the handwriting of Mr. Sergeant and dated April 24, 1775, is in the Library of Princeton University:

To the Committee of Correspondence for the Borough of Elizabeth. Gentlemen:

The very alarming Intelligence we have just received induces us to fear that the Friends of American Liberty will be compelled to resort to the last Appeal for the Protection of their Rights. In this Extremity when no Time should be lost from Preparation we think that a Communication of Sentiment from the different Parts of our Province should take Place; and that no mode of doing this is so proper as that of a Provincial Congress. Should our Brethren concur with us in this Opinion, we would be glad that the Members of the Committees of Correspondence for the Province, to whom it seems to belong, would together with the Chairman, appoint a speedy Day for such Convention. These Sentiments, should they even appear to be erroneous, will need no Apology as They come from Persons who would wish not to be wanting to the common Cause; and the Suddenness of the Occasion hardly admits of formally convening the different Committees. Several of the Committee of Correspondence are in your Neighbourhood or within your influence, which is the Reason of our addressing ourselves to you in this Way.

The above is taken as the Sense of a Meeting of the Inhabitants of Princeton and the Neighbourhood, together with some of the Members of Committees of Somerset & Middlesex and Hunterdon. It is further desired of our Brethren to consider whether it may not be proper to fix some Day shortly before the meeting of the Continental Congress and not too early to be notified to the more distant Parts of the Colony. We have thought of Friday 5 May.

By order of the Meeting

Jonathan D. Sergeant clk

P.S. It is requested that the Contents of this Letter may be communicated on the Passage to the Committees of N. Brunswick & Woodbridge.

That night, April 24, another express with the news of Concord and Lexington in duplicate traversed the province and at half past three in the morning was received by Dr. Wiggins and Mr. Baldwin, and sent on. New Jersey had needed some shock like this to startle it into real activity.

The Princeton letter went the rounds and the proposal it con-

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tained met with instant favor, but the date suggested was too early and on May 2 the committee of correspondence for the province directed the congress to convene at Trenton on the twenty-third, and issued a call to that effect. On the eleventh, the freeholders of Somerset County, Dr. Witherspoon's county, met at Somerset Court House in answer to a call of the county chairman and resolved that "the steps taken by the British ministry to enslave the American Colonies and especially the late alarming hostilities call the people of the province to decide what their part shall be."¹⁸ The meeting readily agreed to the proposed provincial congress and elected nine delegates to endorse all measures necessary for the preservation of their constitutional rights and privileges, and they resolved to join other county representatives in forming such plans for a provincial militia as might seem proper and to arm such a number as they should be ordered to raise. At Princeton the committee of observation was spending money for various patriotic purposes, and furnishing equipment to several rifle companies, expenses for which it was later reimbursed by the Continental Congress, while the New York and Philadelphia papers commented on the martial spirit pervading Somerset County where men were drilling daily.

Governor Franklin had meanwhile received dispatches from England which he believed were calculated to restore harmony, and late in April he issued a proclamation convening the Assembly for May 15. On this date accordingly at Burlington the Assembly met and the next day listened to His Excellency's message laying before the house the plan of reconciliation resolved upon by the House of Commons in February. But it was too late. Mr. Tucker of Hunterdon had a countermove ready and promptly laid beside the message a pamphlet recently received from Great Britain containing an extract of Governor Franklin's letter to the Earl of Dartmouth of February 1 in which he had alluded to the "artful management" by which the last Assembly was induced to endorse the action of the Continental Congress of the preceding September. After debating the address and appointing a committee to frame a reply, the extract of the Gov-

¹⁸ *Provincial Congress Minutes*, p. 114.

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ernor's letter was taken up and it was resolved to ask him whether or not he acknowledged its authorship. As for the plan of conciliation the Assembly informed him that as the Continental Congress was sitting to consider the general situation and the Assembly of New Jersey had already appointed delegates to the Congress, until the latter was heard from the Assembly could do nothing but give the Governor its own sentiments, assuring him, however, that it would abide by the decision of the Congress. The Assembly then declared it did not see that the present plan at all differed from the one offered the year before the Stamp Act was passed, and there seemed no reason for accepting now what was declined then. The Assembly further hoped it was unnecessary to assure His Excellency that the province did not mean to throw off all dependence on Great Britain and get rid of every control exercised by the British legislature. To which the Governor replied that the question whether the plan was old or new was not in point—the question was whether it ought or ought not to be approved; and he professed surprise that the Assembly of New Jersey did not consider itself competent to settle the matter, but must rely on another body for decision. The House merely recommended its delegates to lay the government's plan before the Continental Congress. After which the Governor replied as to the authorship of the "artful management" letter; the Assembly's question he declared was merely another of those personal affronts to which he was becoming accustomed; the Assembly had no right to pry into his correspondence with the King's ministers; but to satisfy curiosity he would say that the extract did not "contain a true representation of the words and substance" of his letter. The Governor was sailing perilously close to the wind; the only change made in the extract was the substitution of the word "every" for the word "several." The House came back with the parting shot that far from being an affront, the inquiry ought to have been a real service to His Excellency by giving him an opportunity to exculpate himself from the charge of writing the letter if the charge were groundless; and after resolving to consider the message on the authorship of the letter at the next session, on May 20 the Assembly adjourned until June. To close this unhappy episode it may be said here

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that at the November session the committee on the address reported and the House, in view of the critical situation of affairs and the necessarily controversial nature of the report, postponed consideration.

Three days after the legislature adjourned, the first provincial congress of New Jersey met at Trenton. Its personnel was almost totally different from that of the Assembly, only seven of its eighty-seven members belonging to the regular body. While Dr. Witherspoon was not a member, his attitude had full representation, nine of the nineteen delegates from Somerset and Middlesex counties, on whose common border-line Princeton lay, being either citizens of the village or connected with the College. Hendrik Fisher was elected president, and to Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant once more fell the duties of the secretaryship, while William Paterson and Frederick Frelinghuysen were appointed his assistants. The four came from Somerset and all but Fisher were graduates of Princeton.

While the members of the Congress fully realized their responsibility they did not realize their powers. It was the first session of such an assembly in the province, the convention of the preceding July having met for the sole and comparatively easy task of electing delegates to the Continental Congress. The new body owed its existence to the acuteness of the stage that the controversy with Great Britain had now reached. No definite powers had been entrusted to it; it had been given the task of providing such ways and means for the security of the province as the exigencies of the time might require; no limitations had been set and its members saw plainly that the business on which they were now assembled might affect the life, property, religion and liberty not only of themselves but of their posterity. They resolved to open each day's session with prayer. Then Mr. Fisher addressed them on the importance of the occasion, counselling the utmost deliberation in all measures pursued in defense of their rights and privileges, and advising the utmost care to support established civil authority for the maintenance of order and the undisturbed administration of justice, as far as was consistent with the preservation of their fundamental liberties. The Congress then declared its profound veneration for, and allegiance

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to, His Majesty the King, following this perfunctory resolution with one more truly sincere, endorsing the delegates appointed by the Assembly in January to represent the province in the Continental Congress, and thanking the Assembly for its attitude toward the general situation. And here the members paused.

Having no precedents or definite instructions, and no constructive instrument wherewith to be guided, and wishing to take no measures inconsistent with the plans of the Continental Congress which was then in session, they turned to it for advice as to the line of conduct they should follow and thus avoid marring or obstructing general views or disappointing the hopes of the more experienced and more widely representative body. They, therefore, sent Mr. William P. Smith and Mr. Elias Boudinot to Philadelphia to secure the advice of the Congress. But the Congress had none to offer. So, feeling their way carefully, the Jersey men resolved adherence to the resolutions of the Congress refusing exportations to the British fisheries, to Quebec, and to other Canadian British possessions on American coasts; it opened correspondence with New York and Connecticut; it drew up articles of association according to the direction of the Congress and ordered copies distributed through the province; it laid down rules to govern the formation of a militia; and it authorized and directed the raising of ten thousand pounds proclamation money for the use of the province; and appointing a committee of correspondence of fourteen to act in its stead, with power to convene the entire provincial congress if necessary, it adjourned on June 3.

Governor Franklin, though ignorant of the actual transactions of the provincial congress, was perfectly aware of the new spirit abroad in his domain. Since the news of Lexington and Concord the Colony had been in the "utmost commotion;" he had seen his people arming themselves, forming companies, and taking "uncommon pains" to perfect themselves in military discipline; he had seen a Freehold band of militia pass his very door "with Colours, Drum & Fife" returning—after a false alarm—from an expedition to secure the colonial treasury and records before the crew of a British man-of-war could seize them; all legal authority

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and government seemed to be drawing to an end, and that of "Congresses, Conventions and Committees establishing in their Place;" the colonial militia officers were all resigning their commissions in the hope of getting others from the Continental Congress; government was "nearly laid prostrate" and public officers were "now only on Sufferance as it were;" the Governor thought they would be well off if allowed to remain even on sufferance, and he remarked a little fearfully that there was not a single warship off the Jersey coast on which the governmental officials might take refuge; if General Gage should beat the provincials in an open engagement he did not doubt that all the governors in America and all the crown officers generally would be seized as hostages in retaliation.¹⁹ When the lawyers of the province in their May term adopted resolutions to do all in their power to prevent unnecessary litigation, since the state of the Colonies required every man for public service, the loudest Tory scoffer must have perceived that New Jersey was becoming thoroughly in earnest.

Things had now reached such a pass that the Synod of New York and Philadelphia was compelled to give them attention at the annual meeting that May. A committee, of which Dr. Witherspoon was chairman, was appointed to draw up a pastoral letter on the situation addressed to the ministers in the Synod to be read to their flocks. He reported a document whose dignity and restraint, no less than its patriotic and statesmanlike tone, rank it among the most striking pronouncements of the period. However the members of the Synod had hitherto avoided the subject in their pulpits, they could no longer make pretence of concealing their private opinions on present public affairs. Now that the controversy seemed inevitably about to be decided by recourse to arms, they are to remember that there is no soldier so undaunted as the pious man, no army so formidable as one whose members are superior to the fear of death. With this introduction Dr. Witherspoon urges his readers to express allegiance to the King at every opportunity, to maintain the union of the Colonies and to support the Continental Congress, to be strict and vigi-

¹⁹Letter to Earl of Dartmouth, May 6 and June 5, 1775. *New Jersey Archives*, 1 ser. vol. X, pp. 590, 601.

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lant in private life and morals, to pay their debts and do their utmost to serve one another, to practise humanity and mercy on the field of battle, meekness and gentleness of spirit which is the noblest attendant on true valor, and to pay strict attention not only to general fasts but to the habitual exercise of prayer. It was altogether such a letter as one might expect from the pen of a former member of the Scottish Popular party. Five hundred copies were ordered to be issued for the use of the Synod. Dr. Gillett says that "they were thus scattered throughout all the congregations contributing in no small measure to kindle and sustain the patriotic zeal of the country;" but not a single copy seems to have been preserved.

In President Witherspoon's appointment to the chairmanship of this important committee may be found not only evidence that his position at this juncture was perfectly assured, but also testimony to his prominence in Presbyterian circles. Besides having been made the Synod's treasurer he had frequently been appointed its representative on public errands, and annually he had been delegated to the joint convention with the New England churches; but now, as author of the Synod's Pastoral Letter at this turning point, he found himself the spokesman of American Presbyterianism in its declaration on the political situation confronting the Colonies.

At a meeting of the freeholders of Somerset County in July, 1775, he was reelected to the county committee of correspondence to serve until May 1776, and he now became its chairman. The provincial congress met again in August and devoted its session of two weeks principally to putting itself on a permanent basis by providing for the election of future congresses, deciding the term of service of delegates, organizing the militia, devising the machinery for raising funds, and arranging for the appointment of standing committees of observation and correspondence to act in its stead between sessions. The only permanent official needed under its simple system was one to handle its meagre funds, and Mr. Jonathan D. Sergeant of Princeton found himself elected provincial treasurer. Appointing a committee on safety to act in its place the Congress on August 17 adjourned until September.

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This committee shared the conservatism of its parent. It was loath to take any very active steps or else to permit them to be recorded. The printed extracts of its minutes contain entries under only four dates and its most important acts were to resolve that hunting frocks should be the uniform of New Jersey's minute men, and that the proceedings of the provincial congress and of the committee of safety should be printed. The dislocation of government was having its effect on the province, tramps and vagabonds, under the picturesque name of "strollers," were abounding, servants were running away from their masters, horse stealing and robberies had become frequent, and the committee recommended all good people to challenge and strictly examine suspicious characters, and if satisfactory account were not given to turn them over to the authorities. It is significant that the meetings of the committee were all held at Princeton.

The college commencement that September had a stamp of its own. The President took for the text of his baccalaureate sermon to the graduating class the twelfth verse of the second chapter of St. Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians. His subject was "Christian Magnanimity," that greatness of mind which would constrain his hearers to act as the apostle had exhorted his readers to act, suitably to the dignity of their character and the challenge of their privileges. Save in his opening sentence where he admitted that the times were a continual trial to Christian faith and constancy, he made no allusion to the struggle on which the Colonies had entered, a struggle in which he frankly hoped that his graduates would take their full share; but it is easy to read between the lines both what he was thinking of and also the wider message he intended his sermon to bear when he pointed out some of the duties that belong to Christian great-mindedness—to attempt great and difficult things, to aspire after great and valuable possessions, to encounter danger with resolution, to struggle against difficulties with perseverance, and to bear suffering with fortitude and patience. This time he said nothing about allegiance to the King.

The address to the senior class with which the baccalaureate ended was striking, but the original version has disappeared. It was in substance repeated by him every year until 1787 and the

Thomas Alden's Sermon
Charles C. Olden 1876.

CHRISTIAN MAGNANIMITY:

A

SERMON,

Preached at Princeton, September, 1775—the Sabbath preceding the

Annual Commencement;

And again with Additions, September 23, 1787,

To which is added,

A N

A D D R E S S

TO THE

SENIOR CLASS,

Who were to receive the Degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON,

D. D. L. L. D.

President of the College of New-Jersey,

PRINCETON:

PRINTED BY JAMES TODD.

M.DCCCLXXXVII.

SERMON ON CHRISTIAN MAGNANIMITY

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version then published contains no reference to the events of 1775. Beginning with a plea for religion he proceeds to urge the further prosecution of studies begun in college; college education is intended only to give the elements and first principles which should whet the appetite for more; the life of a graduate should be one of diligence and application, firmness of mind, and steady perseverance. He urges his hearers to maintain their friendship with one another and to keep up the intimacies of college life: "Man, made for society, derives his chief advantages of every kind from the united efforts of many conspiring to the same end;" piety itself consists of love of God and fervent charity to all men; those who deserve the name of Christians "are said to be pilgrims and strangers in the earth; therefore they ought to keep together, lest they lose their way." No less is this true in respect to literature; he has observed that the eminent men in every nation have appeared in clusters, for the reason that mutual intercourse invigorates natural talents, and here America suffers by the paucity of learned men and the poverty of her libraries.

Then he urges prudence in management of business affairs, order and exactness in dress, books, furniture, and the keeping of accounts; a certain humility, the government of passions and of the tongue, a kindly cheerful interest in the affairs of others—"it is no inconsiderable legacy for a man to leave to his children, that he had always been a friend to others, and never refused his assistance to those who stood in need of it." This leads him to speak once more of friendship—not friendship based on weakness, as in those who seem obliged to have recourse to some other upon whom they may lean and without whom they seem unable to think, act, or even exist, but friendship that is based on judgment as well as affection.

It is one of the greatest comforts of life as well as one of the greatest ornaments to human nature, and its genuineness may be discerned by the following mark; that though it is particular, it is not exclusive. When there is a great but virtuous attachment to a person who deserves it, it will make a man not less but more friendly to all others.

And the final advice is to preserve sacred and inviolable a regard for sincerity and truth:

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So very sacred a thing indeed is truth, that the very shadow of departure from it is to be avoided. . . . Let me therefore recommend to you a strict universal and scrupulous regard to truth; it will give dignity to your character, it will put power into your affairs, it will excite the most unbounded confidence, so that whether your view be your own interest, or the service of others, it promises you the most assured success.

The commencement programme borrowed some of the elevation of the President's baccalaureate and farewell. "Civil liberty promotes virtue and happiness," "*Pax nationis summa felicitas*"—these were only two titles, and the valedictorian sent his auditors away with the echoes of an oration on "Magnanimity" ringing in their ears. Dr. Witherspoon looked over all, and rewrote some of the orations that his students delivered on commencement platforms. The coincidence between the valedictory and his own baccalaureate is possibly not altogether accidental.

The provincial congress met again on October 3, 1775, at Trenton, devoting the rest of the month almost entirely to military and financial matters. The committee of safety which it left in its place on adjournment found more to do and assumed more power in doing it. Five of its members had served on the former committee and had learned their business. It assumed a practical dictatorship over the province, ignoring entirely the existence of the constituted legislature and usurping all the authority of that body, going so far as to confiscate the provincial barracks for the housing of its own troops and the guarding of its own prisoners of war; and after an exciting and active session it adjourned in the middle of January 1776, calling the provincial congress to assemble again on the thirty-first.

Although there were but one or two crown officers left to whom he could talk confidentially about public affairs, Governor Franklin had been doing what he could to keep up some semblance of government; but it was quite clear that the province had now got far beyond his control. He had nevertheless called the General Assembly to meet in November. Up to that time, so he testified in his address, except in one or two instances, none of the royal officers in New Jersey had met with insult or improper treatment; nevertheless, as he went on to say, if he were to take

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the advice of friends he would seek asylum on one of His Majesty's ships; but he proposes to stay. If the Assembly advises differently he would like to know it; in view of the talk of independence by persons "of present consequence" it is high time that each man should know what to expect; if crown officers are in danger, all he asks is to be told so plainly. The Assembly resolved that the government of the province be honorably supported for another year. Petitions from loyalist centres praying the House to enter into resolves discouraging independence and supporting the civil government having been received, the House after debate went on record to the effect that reports of the movement for independence were groundless and the delegates to the Continental Congress were directed to use their utmost endeavors to obtain redress of grievances but to reject any propositions tending to "separate this Colony from the Mother Country, or change the form of Government thereof." On the last day of the month the House delivered its humble address to the Governor in reply to his opening address. Officially speaking, and therefore with some latitude of meaning, it informed him that it conceived his person to be in no danger whatever; officially it knew of no sentiments for independence openly avowed by any "men of consequence," nor did the members approve of any efforts to encourage such measures. They reiterated their "detestation of such opinions" and claimed that in view of their record they should be "exempt from all suspicions of this nature." The irritated Governor knew better, and returned a somewhat caustic reply; one week later the legislature of the province was prorogued—and for the last time.

How different in complexion was the body that now completely took the legislature's place may be surmised from the fact that when the provincial congress in February, 1776, took up the question of new delegates to the Continental Congress and objection was made to the election of a certain member because he favored independence, a vote being demanded, eleven of the twelve counties present approved his election, thus corroborating information that had reached the Governor's ears to the effect that a majority of the Congress favored independence. The new delegation to the Continental Congress was William Living-

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ston, John DeHart, Richard Smith, John Cooper, and Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant.

The Governor's correspondence had already embroiled him with his legislature; it was to get him into more serious trouble a little later. Lord Stirling, having intercepted a dispatch to the Earl of Dartmouth, forwarded the packet to Congress, and, fearing that the Governor would now flee the province, caused his arrest, and with the aid of Chief Justice Smyth secured much against the Governor's will a parole that he would not leave his house. Here, then, he remained conducting government as best he could, with a continental sentry posted at his gate, until the last hour of his falling out with his people, a story which belongs to a subsequent chapter.

As chairman of the Somerset County committee Dr. Witherspoon had been attending to his duties. The county had been at great pains to arm its militia but was short of powder, and a letter of the President's is extant seeking in February, 1776, to buy a ton from Philadelphia.²⁰ His committee was sending frequent suggestions to the provincial congress. It petitioned, for example, that householders and tax-payers in the province be given a vote for county delegates to the Congress, democratic principles which were not generally shared as a counter petition showed, praying that the suffrage be restricted to freeholders. Another suggestive resolution looked to the fortification of Perth Amboy which was defenceless and therefore a likely spot for British attack by water. The papers of February also contained an important proposition announcing county fairs for the sale of linen and other textile goods which is signed by Dr. Witherspoon as chairman of the committee and will be recognized as advocating one of his favorite projects. Considering the importance of promoting manufactures in the county, the committee appointed fixed markets for the sale of linen and woolen goods in particular and of the instruments and materials of their manufacture. The idea was that whatever would make it easy for each person to do a little and turn it to immediate advantage would ultimately be

²⁰New York Public Library, Emmet Collection.

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beneficent at large and thus useful in promoting industry and the beginning of manufactures which might grow to be large and hence of service to the whole country. The schedule of these fairs was so arranged that virtually every week in the year there would be a fair at some town in the county.²¹ But as the late learned editor of the *New Jersey Archives* points out, however much Dr. Witherspoon, coming from a linen manufacturing centre in Scotland, may have hoped to establish a similar manufacture in New Jersey, his project failed. In the main effort of his life during the winter of 1775-1776, however, that of bringing New Jersey into line with other Colonies and inducing it, in spite of its hesitation, to show a fairly solid front, there can be little doubt of his success, although the direct evidence of his work is difficult to secure.

While he received credit at home and abroad for a larger share of responsibility in moulding public opinion and in shaping the events of the next few months than can now be definitely traced, evidence is nevertheless not entirely lacking. For example the vitriolic pen of the Reverend Dr. Jonathan Odell of Burlington devoted five stanzas of his satire *The American Times*, to Dr. Witherspoon's activities from which it is sufficiently clear, even after due allowance is made for their author's bias as a loyalist Anglican, that the President did not limit his efforts to presiding over meetings of county committees or writing proposals to the press or to the provincial congress:²²

Ye priests of Bael, from hot Tartarean stoves
Approach with all the prophets of the groves.
Mess-mates of Jezebel's luxurious mess,
Come in the splendour of pontific dress;
Haste to receive your chief in solemn state;
Haste to attend on Witherspoon the great.
Ye lying spirits too, who brisk and bold
Appear'd before the throne divine of old,
For form, not use, augment his rev'rend train;
The sire of lies resides within his brain.

²¹ *New Jersey Archives*, 2 ser., vol. I, p. 45.

²² Sargent, *Loyalist Poetry of the Revolution*.

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Scotland confess'd him sensible and shrewd,
Austere and rigid; many thought him good.
But turbulence of temper spoil'd the whole,
And show'd the movements of his inmost soul.
Disclos'd machinery loses of its force;
He felt the fact, and westward bent his course.

Princeton received him, bright amidst his flaws,
And saw him labour in the good old cause;
Saw him promote the meritorious work,
The hate of kings, and glory of the kirk.

Return we to the hero of our song.
Who now but he the darling of the throng;
Known in the pulpit by seditious toils;
Grown into consequence by civil broils.

Three times he tried, and miserably fail'd,
To upset the laws—the fourth prevail'd.
Whether as tool he acted, or as guide,
Is yet in doubt; he conscience must decide.
Meanwhile unhappy Jersey mourns her thrall;
Ordain'd by vilest of the vile to fall;
To fall by Witherspoon—O name the curse
Of sound religion and disgrace of verse.

Disgrace of verse or not, the reverend poet was to contrive a
rhyme for the abominated name, for he proceeds—

Member of Congress we must hail him next;
Come out of Babylon was now his text.
Fierce as the fiercest, foremost of the first,
He'd rail at kings, with venom well-nigh burst;
Not uniformly grand—for some bye end
To dirtiest tricks of treason he'd descend.
I've known him seek the dungeon dark as night
Imprison'd Tories to convert or fight;
Whilst to myself I've hummed in dismal tune
I'd rather be a dog than Witherspoon.
Be patient reader—for the issue trust,
His day will come—remember Heav'n is just.

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Even had these verses lacked their undeniable cleverness, the allusion to four separate occasions on which "Witherspoon the great" tried to upset the laws is of itself sufficient to deserve the attention of the most "patient reader." But the identity of these occasions except perhaps in two cases, is now beyond even conjecture. If Dr. Odell's chronology is correct they all antedate President Witherspoon's congressional service and therefore are to be placed before July, 1776. Two of them have completely baffled identification; one other would seem to be an incident described by Mr. Elias Boudinot, the Princeton trustee, in his *Journal*,²³ and the last and successful effort alluded to is certainly the President's share in the deposition of Governor Franklin, to be described in the next chapter.

Mr. Boudinot's story is this: After the adjournment of the provincial congress in March, 1776, an anonymous notice appeared in the newspapers requesting the county representatives of the province to meet at New Brunswick on the nineteenth of April. It happened that the regular spring meeting of the trustees of the College of New Jersey had been set for the seventeenth. The session usually lasted two days. At the end of the first day's business the board adjourned until the morrow; but when it reassembled, much to its surprise the President was absent and nothing was known of his whereabouts. Business accordingly was concluded without him. The next morning Mr. Boudinot and his friend Mr. William P. Smith, journeying home to Elizabeth, halted at New Brunswick to freshen their horses and were reminded by a friend of the meeting of county delegates set for that day, and to their amazement learned that Dr. Witherspoon that morning had appeared and had informed his audience that he was author of the anonymous notice and that the object of the meeting was to "consider the peculiar situation of the Province, and the propriety of declaring a separation from Great Britain and forming an independent Constitution." That they might not be too precipitate, he had proposed an adjournment until the afternoon when he would state his reasons for advocating separation and in the meantime his hearers might think

²³Privately printed, Philadelphia, 1894.

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the matter over. Mr. Boudinot and Mr. Smith decided to remain over and hear what was said. Accordingly in the afternoon Dr. Witherspoon delivered "a very able and elegant" speech of an hour and a half duration, showing the absurdity at that late day of professing full allegiance to Great Britain and support of her courts of justice. The speech, the position of the speaker, his known sympathies with the American cause, and the ability with which he presented his case, created a profound impression. The conservative Mr. Boudinot found himself in an embarrassing position. The meeting of the trustees, all Presbyterians, Dr. Witherspoon in the front rank of that denomination and author of the famous *Pastoral Letter*, leaving Princeton to come to this meeting, Mr. Smith and himself arriving apparently to lend their countenance to the proceedings—it looked as if the move were concocted at Princeton and carried out by Presbyterians. So when the chance came to reply to Dr. Witherspoon's speech, much to the President's surprise and concern Mr. Boudinot boldly declared that the proposal lacked wisdom and prudence; a Continental Congress had been elected to consider public affairs, its members knew the exact condition of the country in regard to finances, cooperation, and the chance of reconciliation with Great Britain as well as in regard to its relation to Europe. New Jersey had no right to force the hand of Congress or drive that body into measures of so delicate a nature until it should give some cue, or advise the Colonies as to procedure. Seasoned debater that he was, Dr. Witherspoon speedily recovered from the shock of this unexpected opposition on the part of a man so prominent in colonial affairs, and started to reply, when two or three gentlemen intimated to Mr. Boudinot that if the speaker continued they would not be responsible for his safety. But Mr. Boudinot knew the rules of debate and properly answered that the Doctor had a right to reply and that if they did not approve of his proposal they should say so openly before the meeting. The President had spoken about twenty minutes in his rebuttal when someone whispered to him and he immediately desisted, telling the chairman that he understood he was giving offence and therefore would say no more on the subject, but hoped each one

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would go back and consult his constituents. Mr. Boudinot demanded a vote which Witherspoon naturally opposed as the debate had not been concluded, but a vote being taken, of thirty-six votes cast, only three or four favored the proposition, the rest rejecting it, according to Mr. Boudinot, "with great warmth." How many did not vote Mr. Boudinot does not say. And thus ended the earliest recorded attempt to feel the pulse of New Jersey on the question of independence.

Apart from Dr. Odell's allusion, if indeed he does refer to it, this curious story finds corroboration in two facts, first, that a meeting of the board of trustees was scheduled for April 17, 1776, and second, that a conference of county committees was called for April 18—not April 19, as Mr. Boudinot remembered it; the slip of memory is negligible. The meeting of the board was held, but the rough minutes were never engrossed in the permanent minute book and have not been preserved, so that we have no means of knowing whether Dr. Witherspoon absented himself from the second day's session. The board was accustomed to assemble at an extraordinarily early hour in the morning and it was quite possible that the second day's session, particularly in the President's absence, closed early enough in the forenoon to allow Mr. Boudinot and Mr. Smith to reach New Brunswick soon after midday. That a call for the conference of county committees at New Brunswick was issued is proved by a notice in the *Pennsylvania Packet* for April 1, 1776, (and apparently in no other newspaper,) emanating from the Somerset county committee of which Dr. Witherspoon was chairman.²⁴ The notice is dated Hillsborough, N. J., March 27, 1776, and reads:

The Committee of Observation and Correspondence for the County of Somerset, in the province of New-Jersey, having taken into their consideration the present state of public Affairs were unanimously of opinion, That it would be highly expedient to have a conference with the Committees of the other counties, previous to the election of members to the Provincial Congress; They did therefore resolve to

²⁴The notice has escaped inclusion in the newspaper extracts printed in the *New Jersey Archives* covering that year.

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invite the Committees of all the counties in this province to a conference on some matters of great importance, at Brunswick, on Thursday the 18th day of April, at 10 o'clock.

Published by order of the Committee

JOHN LAFFERTY, Secretary.

N.N. Letters are sent to every county; but in case of miscarriage, this notice is given.

The notice was, therefore not anonymous as Mr. Boudinot asserts but was signed by the secretary, Witherspoon's name not appearing. However, one of the letters referred to in the postscript—addressed in the hand of a clerk to the chairman of the Monmouth County committee—is in the Library of Princeton University. It contains the resolutions of the Somerset committee as printed in the *Packet* with a note subjoined, in the same clerk's hand:

Sir

Above is a Copy of the Minute of the Committee of Somerset County which I undertook to transmit to you & do Earnestly Request that you will meet the Committee without Delay. Compliance with our Request we cannot Doubt in the present Posture of Affairs.

I am Sir

your Very Humb. Serv^t

JOHN WITHERSPOON praeses.

A copy.

Hence it would appear that, while Dr. Witherspoon's name does not occur in the call itself, it was signed to the added personal note accompanying each copy of the call. His appearance at New Brunswick accordingly could hardly have been as surprising to all of his audience as it was to Mr. Boudinot. Granted that the latter's story is true, even if Mr. Boudinot did not write it down until his old age, the incident would have leaked out inevitably, and in due time would have reached the willing ears of Dr. Odell at Burlington, himself a graduate of the College and so a doubly interested observer of the course being pursued by his alma mater's president. The most striking feature of the story is the evidence it contains that Dr. Witherspoon was far in advance of his province even in April, 1776, in his effort to "overset the law."

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Among the President's papers Dr. Ashbel Green found a fragment of an undated letter prepared for the press on the "*Controversy about Independence*," which does not seem to have been published until Dr. Green included it in his edition of Wither-*poon's Works*.²⁵ It contains the President's summary of the situation just before the colonies declared their independence. After pointing out that "when the claims of the British Parliament were openly made and violently enforced, the most precise and determined resolutions were entered into, and published by every Colony, every county, and almost every township or smaller district, that they would not submit to them," he says that for his own part he would never have signed these resolves if he had not been convinced "that acquiescence in this usurped power, would be followed by the total and absolute ruin of the colonies. They would have been no better than tributary states to a kingdom at a great distance from them." For this reason he declared it was his meaning, and he knows it was the meaning of thousands more, "that though we earnestly wished for reconciliation with safety to our liberties, yet did we deliberately prefer, not only the horrors of a civil war, not only the danger of anarchy and the uncertainty of a new settlement, but even extermination itself to slavery, rivetted on us and our posterity."

In spite of peaceable efforts on the part of the Colonies to obtain relaxation of oppressive Acts, these followed one after another; the constitution and government of Massachusetts were "subverted to their very foundation" and curiously enough the King, Parliament and people of Great Britain in their several public expressions never failed to extol their leniency. He does not infer from this that they were barbarians—"the inference is unnecessary and unjust." But he does infer the misery of the people of America if they must submit in all cases to the dictates of such a body of men.

It has been my opinion from the beginning, he continues, that we did not carry our reasoning fully home, when we complained of an arbitrary prince or of the insolence, cruelty and obstinacy of Lord North, Lord Bute, or Lord Mansfield. What we have to fear, and what we

²⁵ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 205.



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have now to grapple with, is the ignorance, prejudice, partiality and injustice of human nature. Neither king nor ministry could have done, nor durst have attempted, what we have seen, if they had not had the nation on their side. . . . I am firmly persuaded, that had the wiser heads in America met together to contrive what measures the ministry should follow to strengthen the American opposition and defeat their own designs, they could not have fallen upon a plan so effectual as that which has been steadily pursued. . . . Nothing is more manifest, than that the people of Great Britain, and even the king and ministry, have been hitherto exceedingly ignorant of the state of things in America. For this reason, their measures have been ridiculous in the highest degree, and the issue disgraceful.

Some will not believe this. How could the government have been ignorant when they have multitudes in this country to give them intelligence from the beginning? Because they would trust none but so-called official intelligence, "that is to say, from obsequious, interested tools of government; many of them knew little of the true state of things themselves, and when they did would not tell it, lest it should be disagreeable." As for private correspondents, "they thought the friends of American liberty much more considerable, both from weight and numbers, than they were. They conversed with few, but those of their own way of thinking, and according to the common deception of little minds, mistook the sentiments prevailing within the circle of their own acquaintance for the judgment of the public." And here the letter abruptly ends.

A briefer essay on "*Conducting the American Controversy*" dates also from this period and, like the letter on the "*Controversy about Independence*," was prepared for the press, is incomplete, and does not appear to have been published until Ashbel Green placed it in his edition of the President's *Works*.²⁶ It reiterates his belief that more accurate information in Great Britain would have prevented this disagreement. Dr. Witherspoon begins by declaring his respect for George III and his belief that the King wishes the prosperity and happiness of his people in every part of his dominions. "Nay, I have still more to say, I do not think the British ministry themselves have deserved all the

²⁶ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 209.

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abuse and foul names that have been bestowed on them by political writers." Their steps, which have been "unjust, impolitic and barbarous to the highest degree," are due to two chief causes: (1) ignorance or mistake occasioned by the misinformation of interested and treacherous persons employed in their service, and (2) the prejudice common to them, with persons of all ranks in Great Britain.

Taking up the second of these first, he declares that the newspapers contain evidence in plenty "that it was not the King and the ministry only, but the whole nation that was enraged against America." The tide is beginning to turn but he doubts whether it has fairly turned yet

upon any larger principle than a regard to their own interest. . . . It can hardly be expected that the eyes of a whole nation should be at once opened upon the generous principles of universal liberty. It is natural for the multitude in Britain, who have been from their infancy taught to look upon an act of parliament as supreme and irresistible, and to consider the liberty of their country itself as consisting in the dominion of the house of commons, to be surprised and astonished at any society or body of men, calling in question the authority of parliament, and denying its power over them. It certainly required time to make them sensible that things are in such a situation in America, that for the house of commons in Great Britain to assume the uncontrolled power of imposing taxes upon American property, would be as inconsistent with the spirit of the British constitution, as it appears at first sight agreeable to its form.

And because the people of Great Britain have not seen immediately is not to stamp them "destitute of honor and truth." He therefore grieves to hear pleaders of American liberty mixing

so much of abuse and invective against the ministry in general, as well as particular persons, with their reasonings in support of their own most righteous claim. I have often said to friends in America, on that subject, it is not the king and ministry, so much as the prejudices of Britons, with which you have to contend. Spare no pains to have them fully informed. Add to the immoveable firmness with which you justly support your own rights, a continual solicitude to convince the people of Britain, that it is not passion but reason that inspires you. Tell them it cannot be ambition, but necessity, that makes you run



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an evident risk of the heaviest sufferings, rather than forfeit for yourselves and your posterity the greatest of all earthly blessings.

It gave him still more uneasiness, he said, that many American patriots seemed to think themselves "interested in the prosperity of that most despicable of all factions that ever existed in the British empire, headed by the celebrated John Wilkes." He is glad that no American has ever gone to such extremes as the people of Britain in this connection. "Far greater insults were offered to the sovereign within the city of London, and within the verge of the court, than ever were thought of or would have been permitted by the mob in any part of America." But dutiful and respectful as the people of America are, some things published seemed to intimate "that we had one and the same cause with the author of the *North Britain* No. 45. . . . Nothing could be more injudicious than this conduct in the Americans; and it arose from the most absolute ignorance of political history. The Stamp Act, that first-born of American oppressions, was framed by the chief men of that very faction; and it is plain from their language to this hour, that they make no other use of American disturbances, but as engines of opposition, and to serve the mean purposes of party or of family interest." He does not mean by this statement to take any part with or against the present ministry; he has seen many changes of ministry, without any sensible change in the state of public affairs. The present question is greater than the mere matter of who is in or who is out of court favor:

I look upon the cause of America at present to be a matter of truly inexpressible moment. The state of the human race through a great part of the globe, for ages to come, depends upon it. Any minister or ministry, who is in or out of court favor, at a particular juncture, is so little a matter, that it should not be named with it.

The preparation of articles for the press, and the distractions of a busy public life, coupled with the unceasing round of college duties, did not prevent Dr. Witherspoon from keeping in close touch with absent members of his family and especially with his youngest and most brilliant son, David. His three sons had now graduated and his oldest daughter had married. Nine of

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his letters to David written during 1776 and 1777 have been saved in Dr. Green's *Christian Advocate*, the only family letters from the President's pen that are known. Besides family references and the latest news of the war, they contain fatherly counsel which reveals as nothing else can the tenderer side of the President's character. One of the originals, here quoted in full (Dr. Green printed it only in part), is in the Library of Princeton University; the manuscripts of the others have disappeared. David Witherspoon had been graduated at the age of fourteen and now was teaching at Hampden-Sidney Academy in Virginia, under the direction of his brother-in-law Samuel Stanhope Smith.²⁷

²⁷ David Witherspoon was born at Paisley, Scotland, September 22, 1760. Entering the Nassau Hall Grammar School in 1768, at commencement in 1769 he delivered the Latin salutatory opening the school's graduation exercises. Proceeding into the freshman class of the College in 1770, at commencement in 1771 he shared with Henry Brockholst Livingston the freshman prize in Latin. Although precocious he was graduated in 1774 without honors. His brother-in-law Samuel Stanhope Smith in 1775 offered him a modest position in the newly organized Hampden-Sidney Academy, his father continuing him an allowance and even sending him shoes (of which, however, he only guessed at the size). "*Je n'oublierai pas ma promesse que je vous donnerai vingt cinque ou trente livres par an*" is a sentence in a letter of October, 1776, which was followed by a letter in Latin wherein occurs this: "*Mitto ad te unum par calceorum quanquam incertus sum an sint pedibus tuis apti & idonei.*" In 1777 David was a lieutenant in the company of Hampden-Sidney students who volunteered. Shortly afterwards he began the study of law but in March, 1780, was acting as secretary to Mr. Huntington, President of the Continental Congress. In October, 1788, he married Mary (Jones) Nash, widow of Governor Abner Nash of North Carolina. He settled at or near New Bern, N. C., practised law, and subsequently represented Wilkes County in the North Carolina legislature. He seems to have prospered as his will disposes of property and slaves. He was a Mason, being companion in the Royal Arch Chapter at New Bern. Seven years after the President's death David revisited Princeton for the benefit of his health and brought with him his young son. His will, dated October 24, 1801, was drawn and witnessed at Princeton on this visit. Less than two months later, in December 1801, the clerk of Craven County, North Carolina, certified in court that David Witherspoon had died. Depositions of the witnesses to his will were taken and the will eventually was probated. The exact date and place of death have not been found. He was buried, it is thought, in the Nash family vault on Pembroke Plantation, near New Bern, but during the Civil War the spot was desecrated and the vault obliterated.

His son John Nash Witherspoon (b. 1792, d. 1853), whom he had intended to send to Princeton, was graduated at the University of North Carolina, but received the honorary degree of Master of Arts from Princeton in 1815 and that of Doctor of Divinity in 1836, when he was moderator of the General Assembly.

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Princeton, May 6, 1776.

My dear David

I have received your three letters regularly & am obliged to you for writing so punctually. The one from Baltimore of March 31 I received April 5. The one from Portroyal of April 6 I received April 21 & the last by Mr. Spencer of April 23 I received last night. It gives us great Pleasure to know of your Safety & arrival at your Brothers. I shall be glad to be informed of as many particulars of your Situation as possible—How much did it cost you to complete the Journey? What have you done with your horse? I think it would be best to sell him for what he would fetch & not to buy another unless you can easily maintain him without being burdensome to Mr. Smith.

It gives me much pleasure to see by your last that you propose to teach the French. If you do this with Care & Application it will soon perfect you in that Language. Take particular pains to prepare & fit yourself for any thing you do. Take pleasure in doing things with Accuracy & Perfection. To see you a complete Scholar will be the greatest Delight you can give to me except your being a good Man which is of more Consequence still but I hope they will both go together. I beg it of you not to forget the particular Advices I gave you at parting & have often recommended. Keep pen & Ink always about you or by you & take Notes of many things as well as your Expenses. In writing your Letters keep black Lines till you can write Straight and neatly without them. To write Latin well & with Spirit is a great Accomplishment & I desire that you would write to me as often as possible. Mr. Smith is mistaken as to the Miscarriage or opening of Letters, I believe it was owing to my not writing so frequently as I ought to have done. But if you write to me often you may depend upon it your Letters shall not be henceforth long neglected.

As you are now among strangers take particular Care of your behavior for a Character is soon formed & often easily lost. If you mind your Business with Diligence every body will approve & applaud you and on the Contrary Idleness is soon observed & always blamed. Be obliging and friendly to all. I do not know so general or so excellent a Rule for good Manners as to think concerning others as every good Man ought to think. If you wish them well in your heart you will certainly be civil to them in your Behavior.

I would be happy that you would write to me sometimes a Letter in Latin or french but you may delay that till you receive one from me in one or the other of these languages by way of Example. La

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première Lettre que Je vous écrirai sera en françois ou en Latin ou peut être en tous les deux.

We are all in our Ordinary health here & remember you all kindly. You may easily Suppose we were made very happy by hearing of Mrs. Smith's safe Delivery without ever having heard of her being with Child. I sent a Letter to Mr. Smith from Philadelphia last week by a private hand who has promised to take particular Care of it. With him I sent 2 pair of shoes & one of slippers for Annie which I wish may get safe there & answer in point of size.

Your Brother James was here lately a few Days & has returned to Ryegate. John Ross who has married Jean Hyndman has bought up his Time & engaged to go with James & work with him this Summer. Alex. Inglis is to go likewise James [torn] to you or his Sister or both before he went away. Professor Houston [torn] to Jenny Smith.

Mr. Reid late our Schoolmaster now Lieutenant & Charles Beatty past this place for Quebeck both of them learned a little French with me & it is likely to be of great service to them. Spare no pains to make yourself Master of that language.

I think it would not be amiss to make some Acquaintance with Mr. Purdie Printer at Williamsburg for books. I will write to him soon. I write by this Post to Mr. Smith. Make my Compliments to John Smith & write to me what he proposes to follow.

I am Dr David your affect Father

JNO. WITHERSPOON²⁸

Later in the summer of 1776 the President wrote

I am glad to perceive that you are endeavouring to make yourself master of the French; continue in it carefully, and be sure to read through, and be well acquainted with the dialogues and conversation phrases in the Grammar. . . . Make yourself as useful as possible to Mr. Smith and perfect your classic learning. . . . It gives me great pleasure to see that the school increases so fast. I hope no pains will be spared to make the scholars as complete as possible. You ought to exercise them well in the grammar and syntax. It would be a great advantage if they were kept some part of their time to writing and arithmetic. If among you you can bring it about that the boys write their letters to their parents neatly and sensibly, it will give them great pleasure. Many of them are not judges how far they profit in Latin and Greek; but if they write their letters well they will perceive their

²⁸ Mrs. Smith was the President's daughter Ann; James Witherspoon was graduated in 1770, Charles Clinton Beatty in 1775, and John Smith in 1770.

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improvement; and on the contrary, if they write nothing home but blotted, ill-spelled nonsense, they will suppose they have learned nothing, though you take ever so much pains. Your letters which are before me, please me better than any you have written. . . . Remember, my dear boy, to fear God, and serve him in sincerity and truth. Let this be your first and highest care, and accomplish yourself as much as possible for usefulness in life.

That autumn, receiving a letter from David in French, the President replied:

Votre frère Smith par la lettre et M. Jean Smith par la conversation m'ont rendu tout à fait heureux en m'assurant de votre diligence et bonne conduite. Ils m'ont dit que vous enseignez dans l'école avec prudence et assiduité, et que vous ne vous mêlez point avec les folies & badinages des jeunes gens; enfin que vous êtes respecté & aimé des écoliers, et vous appliquez aussi à vos autres études. Continuez mon cher fils d'être sage et diligent. C'est le tems dans votre jeunesse de cultiver vos talents, d'acquérir des connoissances, et de vous rendre capable des plus hauts et honorables emplois. Vous savez bien avec quel ardeur je souhaite votre progrès dans les arts et votre bonheur pour toute la vie . . . Soyez diligent; écrivez souvent et avec tout le soin et précaution possible, afin que vous soyez perfectionné dans cet art. . . . Votre lettre françoise est bien écrite . . . Vous apprendrez bientôt à parler quand vous aurez opportunité et occasion. Pour cet effet lisez souvent les phrases familiales dans la grammaire. Je souhaite aussi que vous lisiez beaucoup en Latin, afin que vous pouviez lire les livres classiques avec plaisir. Sitôt que vous entendiez fort bien Horace & Virgile vous les lirez & répéterez avec le même plaisir qu'une poème Anglaise.

And a few days later he sent David a letter in Latin:

Gaudio quam maximo affectus fui, per fratris literas & per amicorum vestrum Joannem Smith, audire te esse modestum, diligentem, & studiis debitum. Optime dixit Solomon, 'Sapiens filius Patrem loetum efficit.' Perge obsecro, mi fili, amato libros, incumbito studiis, ut sis doctus, & ideo carus amicis, amabilis omnibus . . . Cupio plurimum quam saepissime a te audire.

On May 17, 1776, the fast day appointed by the Continental Congress, Dr. Witherspoon in a ringing sermon seized the chance at last to come out fairly for the cause in which he was so deeply

The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men.

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D
A T P R I N C E T O N,

On the 17th of MAY, 1776.

B E I N G

The GENERAL FAST appointed by the CONGRESS
through the UNITED COLONIES.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

An ADDRESS to the NATIVES of SCOTLAND residing in
AMERICA.

By JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D.
PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW-JERSEY.

P H I L A D E L P H I A :

PRINTED AND SOLD BY R. AITKEN, PRINTER AND
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HOUSE, FRONT-STREET.
M.DCC.LXXVI.

SERMON ON THE DOMINION OF PROVIDENCE
OVER THE PASSIONS OF MEN

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involved. Whatever he may have hitherto written anonymously for the newspapers, or have expressed in private, we have his definite word that this sermon preached in Nassau Hall was his first political utterance from the pulpit. Its subject was "The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men,"²⁹ and the text was taken from the tenth verse of the seventy-sixth Psalm. In view of the contest in which the Colonies were engaged, a contest "the length of which it is impossible to foresee and the issue of which it will perhaps be thought presumptuous to foretell," Dr. Witherspoon applies the spirit of the text to the Colonies and to the plague of war. "The ambition of mistaken princes," he declares, "the cunning and cruelty of oppressive and corrupt ministers and even the inhumanity of brutal soldiers, however dreadful, shall finally promote the glory of God." For the first time, he says, he is introducing politics into his pulpit; the cause that has led him to this action is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of humanity. But his audience shall not hear from him in the pulpit what they have never heard from him in conversation; he will not rail at the King, or at his ministers and the Parliament and people of Great Britain, as barbarous savages. "Many of their actions have probably been worse than their intentions." He refuses submission to their unjust claims because they are men and therefore liable to the bias inseparable from human nature. He calls unjust the British claims of making laws to bind the Colonies in all cases, because the distance separating Great Britain from the Colonies renders a wise and prudent administration of American affairs as impossible as the claim is unfair. Such is the ignorance of Great Britain as to the real state of affairs in the Colonies, so much time must elapse before a mistake can be seen and remedied, and so much injustice and partiality must be expected from the misrepresentation of interested parties, that "for these Colonies to depend wholly upon the legislature of Great Britain would be, like many other oppressive connexions, injury to the master and ruin to the slave." The colonists' opposition to

²⁹ *Works*, vol. II, p. 407, separately printed late in July, 1776, by Robert Aitken of Philadelphia and dedicated to John Hancock, president of Congress. Two editions were published at Glasgow in 1777, and another in London, 1778. See also *Scots Magazine*, vol. XXXIX, p. 96.

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the claim of the British ministry does not come from a seditious and turbulent spirit, or a wanton contempt of legal authority, but from a concern for the interest of their country and the safety of themselves and their posterity. And if to the justice of their cause and the purity of their principles his hearers add prudence of conduct they will have the greatest reason to hope for final success. Prudence in conducting the struggle implies union, firmness and patience; and by these he means obedience to those chosen to lead, adherence to duty, and fortitude in adversity. And he concludes by recommending first, attention to religion, for "he is the best friend of American liberty who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down profanity and immorality of every kind." Next, he exhorts all who do not go into the field to devote themselves to works of industry with the utmost diligence, so will they not only supply the necessities but also add to the strength of their country. Therefore he urges on all the virtues of frugality and temperance. And finally he begs his hearers to remember that their duty to God, to their country, to their families, and to themselves, is the same—it is the man of piety and inward principle that we may expect to find the uncorrupted patriot, the useful citizen, and the invincible soldier. "God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both."

It was one of the few occasions on which President Witherspoon approached real eloquence. On that May morning at Princeton he spoke from a heart whose feeling had long been pent up. It was no academic occasion, not even a routine Sabbath sermon; the gates were lifted and for once the liberty-loving soul within him supplanted the calculating logician. To appreciate the noble dignity of this great discourse one should read in contrast some of the raving effusions that found their way into contemporary print—such for example, to point the criticism with only Princetonian sins of commission, as the Reverend George Duffield's parallel between George III and Pharaoh, or Dr. Nathaniel Whitaker's *Antidote to Toryism* wherein things are reduced to a series of violent elemental principles of which the

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conclusion, in mild paraphrase, is that the Almighty demands that people struggling for their liberties shall treat as open enemies, and shall reject as unworthy the privileges others enjoy, those members of the community who do not join them, a doctrine which the frenzied preacher found wrapped up in the very bowels of his volcanic text "Curse ye Meroz . . . because they come not to the help of the Lord."

While preparing his fast-day sermon Dr. Witherspoon was also planning an appeal to a wider audience than the one he addressed at Princeton. There were certain broad points of view, certain fundamental concepts of society and life that he feared were in danger of being lost in the immediate glare of open hostilities and these he wished to set before the reading, thinking public. He was one of the promoters of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, a periodical started in January, 1775, by his compatriot and protégé Robert Aitken, the Philadelphia printer. Aitken was employing as his editor Thomas Paine, at that time still a lately arrived seeker after the fame that lay before him. The fact that this Englishman had actually experienced the hardships of life among the lower classes which Dr. Witherspoon felt to be the shame of the British nation; the knowledge that he had come to America to seek a fairer chance at life's possibilities; his warm-hearted enthusiasms and his ability to express them on paper, these were some of the factors that originally enlisted the President's sympathy for this young man "with genius in his eyes." During 1775 Dr. Witherspoon under the pen-name of "Epaminondas" had been contributing to the *Magazine* among other essays a series of "Letters on Marriage" and also one of "Letters on Education," or more accurately, the education of children in "the principles of religion as well as every branch of polite literature." In the last letter on education (January, 1776) he speaks as though he intended to continue the series, but 1776 demanded sterner, timelier stuff. *Common Sense* had burst upon the public that month and had crystallized the sentiment for independence. Dr. Witherspoon must have known the secret of its authorship; he must have seen the pamphlet before he made his unsuccessful attempt to force New Jersey's declaration; he certainly had read it before his fast-day sermon was written. Now that the Colonies

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were actually fighting for their liberties he felt that he had a deeper message for the times and he began his "Druid" papers, issuing the first group of three in the May, June and July numbers respectively of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*.

In the opening paper after explaining that his pseudonym was suggested "by the place which is now, and is likely to be, my residence while I continue on earth"—"Tusculum" is meant of course—, and after touching lightly on his own attitude toward life, now having reached the age of fifty—he was fifty-three, to be exact—"a cool and contemplative season when men of education or business have generally seen as much of the world as satisfies their curiosity," he announces that his general subject is to be the philosophy of human nature and human life. "Literature and morals, arts, and industry, shall be my chief themes; and under one or other of these, every thing may be introduced, that can in the least contribute to the happiness of social or private life." In the treatment of these subjects he will "have a particular view to the state and interest of this rising country." And to those who may think that the present (May, 1776) is a time for action rather than speculation he begs to say that this is a mistake. He looks not with solicitude but with unshaken confidence on the present struggle for the liberties of mankind and he is much mistaken if "the time is not just ripe at hand when there shall be greater need than ever in America for the most accurate discussion of the principles of society, the rights of nations, and the policy of states," all of which shall have a place in these essays.

In the June number he discusses the waging of war. Natural rights and the cause of liberty in general have been explained in unnumerable treatises, ancient and modern, and the application of these principles to the American controversy has been handled by writers of the day with the greatest clearness and precision, and even the nature of government and the methods of balancing a civil constitution have been discussed though less ably. He will, therefore, leave these topics for the present and as the country is engaged in a war "somewhat singular in its nature" he will discuss the manner of carrying on war. It had been asserted that the enemy in their conduct of the war have acted contrary to the

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rules of war, but no one has yet pointed out what these rules are. When independent nations disagree they have no court of last resort to which they may appeal save that of the sword. In this extremity is there any law by which their acts are controlled? And if there is, to whom shall appeal be made when that law is broken.

That there is such a law—the law of nature and of nations—he considers evident not only from universal acknowledgment but from the very nature of the thing. If there be any duties binding on individuals in a state of natural liberty the same are binding between independent nations. Bodies politic do not differ in this circumstance from individuals. The single purpose of society is to protect the individual. To whom, however, shall appeal be made when this law is trampled on? The sanction of the law is nothing else than a sense of duty and accountableness to the Supreme Judge together with the sense of fear that a breach of the law will bring upon the offender reproach and infamy among all the nations and probably resentment and indignation by common consent. Hence a recourse to arms is often called an appeal to heaven and is generally accompanied by some public declaration to convince other nations of the justice of the cause.

How may war be carried on? By all manner of force or open violence except acts agreed by common consent of modern times to be cruel and inhuman, such as refusing quarter to those who surrender, killing or torturing prisoners, women, and children, indiscriminate destruction of property, the use of poisoned weapons, and the poisoning of springs and provisions, the principle underlying these restrictions being “that all acts of cruelty which have no tendency to weaken the resisting force are contrary to reason and religion and, therefore, to the law of nature and nations.” As examples of the breach of this law he cites the undeniable attempt of the British to set the Indians upon the back settlements. This is an act of unjustifiable barbarity because of the well-known method of warfare employed by the Indians. Another instance is the effort made by the British to liberate slaves and stir them up to rebel against their masters. This is as base and treacherous an act and as universally condemned as to suborn the servants of a military leader to assassinate him privately

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although to aim at his life in open battle is not only fair but "prudent." The principle above laid down will make us judge how to view acts of violence and depredation. When an army can avail itself of the goods and property of the members of an hostile state, or reduce them to surrender, not only the seizure but the reduction may both be justifiable; but when men can only destroy and not possess and the destruction can only fall upon helpless people, it is not only inconsistent with greatness of mind but for the most part works against the interest of the destroyer, since it operates as an inflammatory principle.

For these reasons he believes that the burning and destroying of houses where there is no fortress, as has in some instances been done, is barbarous, savage, and inhuman.

In the "Druid" of July, 1776, the third and last of the first series, Dr. Witherspoon discusses the distinction between foreign and civil wars and the two varieties of the latter; insurrection of disorderly citizens against law and order, and resistance of part of a monarchy or republic against the constituted authority on the ground of suffering under oppression and with the purpose of a redress of grievances or of a complete reorganization of government. History has dignified such as are successful by the name of Revolutions; if unsuccessful, they are called Rebellions. But success is no criterion of justice.

The author then discusses the conduct of civil war and concludes that only in the first case may behavior be different from that which governs in war between independent States. But when the grounds of the quarrel are plausible on both sides, and when persons of strictest honor and integrity may be found in both parties, all are bound to candor in judgment, and humanity and mercy in their conduct toward one another. And pointing his essay with the present controversy he sees the perfect justice and great importance of the claims on the one hand, and as easily appreciates the power of prejudice on the other. There was not the most distant thought of subverting the government, or of hurting the interest of Great Britain nor the least desire of withdrawing allegiance from the common sovereign until it became necessary and indeed was the result of that sovereign's deliberate choice. On the other hand he readily understands that the Brit-

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ish people who have long been accustomed to subjection, and from whom subjection is due, cannot easily enter into the reasons for exempting from the same burdens a people otherwise situated. Finally, he lays down the precept that humanity is the noblest attendant of true valor and he will probably fight most bravely who never fights until he has to, and who ceases to fight as soon as the necessity is past.

Here the "Druid" essays came to an end, with the periodical that contained them. The summer of 1776 and the next few years were to be far too busy a time for magazine writing, however edifying. When Dr. Witherspoon resumed the series in 1781 it was to take up a totally different topic.

CHAPTER SIX

INDEPENDENCE

THE "Druid" essays were anonymous although their authorship was probably no great secret; but the sermon on the "Dominion of Providence" had thrust Dr. Witherspoon into the glare of public notice, and from this time on for the next six years he was to remain a public character. Just now he was plunging deeper into New Jersey's political struggle. There was no time to be wasted; everything was sacrificed to public service; as usual of late he missed the opening exercises of the Synod meeting that May, and when he arrived it was only to ask permission to be allowed to go home at once. There was work to be done in Jersey where he had been elected a delegate from Somerset County to the provincial congress which was to meet in June. Before that date arrived the first of the swiftly successive incidents occurred that marked the closing hours of British rule in New Jersey.

On May 30 Governor Franklin had issued a proclamation calling for a special session of the Assembly, giving as his indefinite but sole reason that he had "matters of great importance to the public welfare" to communicate. No hint was offered as to what these matters were. The next regular session was not due until October. Perhaps less than anyone in the province did the Governor realize that his action would strain to the breaking point the storm-cloud that had been settling down about his head and was to sweep him from the exalted position he had occupied for twelve years. He had given Lord Stirling his word of honor that he would not leave the province without the knowledge of the revolutionary party, and his word was that of a gentleman. Since his arrest in January, therefore, he had lived an uneventful if uncertain life. Had he not issued his proclamation of May the leaders of the June provincial congress would have been compelled to devise some direct pretext for his deposition. A stroke of his pen gave them what they wanted. No sooner was the proclamation issued than from Somerset County appeared (June 6) unsigned,

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but containing strong indications of President Witherspoon's authorship, an open letter entitled "Reflections on Public Affairs recommended to the Perusal of the Members of the New Jersey Assembly."¹ The writer calls attention to the fact that the Governor, contrary to custom in calling special meetings of the Assembly, had given no intimation of the nature of these alleged "matters of importance." Assemblymen would, therefore, have to exercise the spirit of divination or else come totally unprepared to discuss them; at any rate they would be unable to consult their constituents, and as things were now circumstanced these matters might be of the greatest magnitude and could with propriety be determined only by ascertaining the sentiments of the people at large. The present move on the Governor's part looked like nothing else than an

insidious design to lay hold on the present combination of apparently unfortunate circumstances to distract and divide our counsels and thereby to throw us into so much confusion and disorder as that we may the more readily be induced to submit to any terms they may think fit to propose, or perhaps to give ourselves up entirely to the old Government as the readiest way out of our present difficulties.

Some weak and many willing minds thought that the resolution of the Continental Congress on May 15 was a final bar to reconciliation and it was held up by adherents to the Crown as the test whereby to distinguish those who wished independence and those who desired reconciliation, whereas many who advocated compliance with Congress sincerely hoped for ultimate reconciliation. By taking this attitude the Crown's advisors had divided the people into two classes, for and against independence, thus hoping to divide the Colonies against themselves, for if they could get one Colony from the rest, especially one of the middle Colonies, they would consider their work well done; the Colonies would soon be fighting one another and thus fall an easy prey to their oppressors' machinations.

Whether this warning had any share in the outcome or not, it turned out that the Governor's call had come too late and the special meeting of the Assembly never took place. The provincial

¹ *American Archives*, 4 series, Vol. VI, p. 723.

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congress which was to assemble ten days before that meeting had yet to be reckoned with. The delegates were slow in appearing at Burlington on the tenth of June. No quorum was obtainable until the afternoon of the next day when the reading of certificates of election was the only business transacted. Business proper began at the evening session which Dr. Witherspoon opened with prayer. One distinctly new element appeared in this congress—that of clerical members. The clergy of the province had come out as public leaders and were assuming their share of responsibility. To conservatives like Mr. Boudinot this fact was deplorable. "Our clergy unhappily have gone distracted," he wrote to another Princetonian, the Reverend James Caldwell,² on June 19, 1776,

and have done us more injury than I am afraid they will do us good, in a great while. They have verified what our Enemies have so often prognosticated. We have been quarreling with the Ch. of England these 40 years past, about uniting Civill and Ecclesiastical Power, and now at the moment we have the shadow of Power in our Hands, we are running into the same extreme. Six, or seven clergymen set up for candidates at the late election among whom three were elected viz: Dr. Witherspoon (who is at the Bottom of it) Mr. Green and Dominie Hardenburg. This has given amazing offence and has raised a cry agt our clergy that must ruin their influence in every station.³

Throughout this period of uncertainty Mr. Boudinot, who had not forgotten Dr. Witherspoon's performance at New Brunswick, appears to have been extremely cautious; but he was to live long enough to have the leisure to revise his opinion as to the ruin of the clergy's influence because of their political activity.

The complexion of the new provincial congress was in another respect also very different from that of its predecessor. In the congress that had adjourned in March, twenty-five per cent of the fifty-two members had failed to appear and this neglect of duty was not forgotten. Of the sixty-five delegates to the June

² Events proved that Mr. Caldwell was to be anything but a conservative. He is the hero of Bret Harte's ballad *Caldwell of Springfield*, and whether this poem is based on fact or not, at least Mr. Caldwell's tragic history admits of no doubt as to his unhesitating support of the colonial cause.

³ *Henkel's Catalogue*, March 14, 1912, Lot 1057.

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body only twenty-five had been members of the earlier session. Burlington and Somerset Counties had totally new delegations, while in each of those from Middlesex, Essex, and Salem, only one man had served before. The most striking group was the quintet sent down from Somerset. At Dr. Witherspoon's side was the Reverend Jacob Hardenburgh, the Dutch reformed minister of Raritan, an honorary graduate of Princeton, and later so keenly "wanted" by the British that he is said to have kept a loaded musket by his bedside in readiness for self-defence. He was to become a leader in New Jersey's constitutional deliberations and later to be the first President of Queen's College, at New Brunswick. Two college-mates, fellow soldiers in Lord Stirling's Somerset militia, were James Linn who was graduated from Princeton in 1769 and whose later legislative record well sustained his early reputation, and Frederick Frelinghuysen, one of the Princeton commencement orators of 1770, who had just turned his twenty-third birthday but had already served a term in Congress and was destined to serve again. The future associate justice of the United States Supreme Court William Paterson, another Princetonian, was the fifth delegate and was elected secretary of the Congress.

There is no evidence that this group or any other controlled the majority, but there can be no doubt that the Somerset men exercised the strongest sort of influence. Their voting was unflaggingly along one line and toward one end. In the previous sessions votes had been cast by counties and it is impossible from the printed record to follow individual votes; but thanks to a resolution of this session that yea and nay votes should be recorded if any member so moved and were seconded, we can follow each delegate's action on leading questions.

The convention was by no means unanimous. To Bergen county unexpectedly enough seems to belong the honor of leading the conservative party. The first test of strength came on the morning of the twelfth when it was moved by the conservatives that not less than two-thirds of the whole body constitute a quorum; but it was no time for possible filibustering and the motion was defeated by a vote of more than two to one, Dr. Witherspoon and his Somerset colleagues voting solidly against it as

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might be expected. A resolution for majority rule accordingly prevailed. This preliminary skirmish over, the vital question of the day was approached, whether or not New Jersey should comply with the recommendations of the Continental Congress of May 15, that government under the Crown ought to be suppressed since it could no longer be supported, and that each Colony, therefore, should adopt such form of government as would conduce to the happiness and safety of its constituents in particular and of America in general. Two petitions from the south ward of Perth Amboy looking toward these ends were read that day, but Perth Amboy, seat of the official residence of the Governor, was a city divided against itself, for three days later—on Saturday the fifteenth (misprinted “sixteenth” in the minutes)—arrived a belated petition from the north ward praying that the government be not changed. Shrewsbury in Monmouth County filed a petition to the same effect, but the hour for appeals of that color was past. The progressive party was in the saddle and these petitions were laid on the table.⁴

The Governor's proclamation came up for discussion on Friday the fourteenth, and the process of battering down the last vestige of colonial government in New Jersey was begun. In view of the recent recommendation of the Continental Congress, the provincial congress boldly resolved by a vote of thirty-eight to eleven that Governor Franklin's call ought not to be obeyed. Following this direct blow at constituted authority it was resolved on Saturday the fifteenth that Governor Franklin had by his proclamation acted in direct contempt and violation of the resolution of the Continental Congress, on which proposition the yeas and nays were not called. Next it was voted that he had shown himself an enemy to the liberties of the country and measures ought to be taken for his arrest, a motion which was carried by a vote of forty-two to ten. And finally it was voted that his salary be stopped forthwith, the vote being forty-seven to three. The trio of negatives on this motion had voted bravely for the

⁴A similar petition signed by a number of inhabitants of New Jersey is in *American Archives*, 4 series, vol. VI, p. 788.

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Crown throughout the debate. For their courage at least they deserve to be recorded.⁵

It is said that on this date, Saturday, June 15, William Livingston, William Paterson, John Mehelm, and Dr. Witherspoon were appointed a committee to arrange the details of the governor's arrest and deposition.⁶ The procedure to be followed would certainly have been left to a committee to decide, but the minutes show no such appointment, no manuscript corroboration of the assertion has been found, and Mr. Livingston was not even a member of the congress. At any rate, the committee, if appointed, lost no time in reporting, for that very day it was resolved that to Colonel Nathaniel Heard of the First Middlesex Battalion be assigned the delicate task of offering to the Governor a parole, giving him choice of Princeton, Bordentown, or his own estate at Raucoco, as a place of retirement, within six miles of which he was to remain during the war unless otherwise directed. He was also to engage not to give information to the enemy or do or say anything in opposition to or in prejudice of the proceedings and measures of the Continental Congress during the present trouble. If he refused to sign the parole he was to be kept under close guard until further orders.

On Monday the seventeenth, petitions from the villages of Windsor and Maidenhead (now Lawrenceville) came in praying that a new form of government be established, and the congress resolved that on the following Friday it would consider the propriety of forming a new government, would elect new delegates to the Continental congress and would draft instructions for their guidance. That morning at Perth Amboy Colonel Heard, armed with an order signed by president Tucker of the provincial congress, had presented the parole to the Governor. The latter promptly refused to sign it and forbade the colonel at his peril to execute the alternative of the congress. Heard at once appealed to his new superiors for instructions and the next day was ordered to bring the Governor to Burlington to face his judges, and

⁵ John Allen of Hunterdon, Daniel Isaac Brown of Bergen, (Princeton, 1753) and Thomas Potts of Sussex.

⁶ Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 300.

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a report of the whole proceeding was sent to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. This body recommended that the New Jersey convention proceed with the Governor's examination and report to the Continental Congress, and the recommendation was forwarded to Dr. Witherspoon by Mr. Hancock, President of the Congress, in a personal letter dated Saturday, June 19. The fact that Mr. Hancock transmitted the resolution to Dr. Witherspoon rather than to an officer of the congress suggests clearly the prominence of Dr. Witherspoon in its councils. On Friday the twenty-first accordingly, Franklin was brought before the provincial congress to be examined on such parts of his conduct as were "hostile to American liberties," and the curtain rose on the most dramatic scene in New Jersey's political history. The province had reached her parting of the ways and had made her choice. At best, the examination of the Governor could have been little more than a form. Even had he been able to make out a case for himself, his official usefulness was at an end. He was well aware of his predicament but he faced his doom unflinchingly, maintaining to the end the bearing of an undaunted and loyal officer of the Crown. Beneath the surface there was something very sobering and almost pathetic in the scene, for it marked the final passing of an old established order with all its historic associations, its power, and its rich prestige. The confrontation of this splendidly representative figure of a British colonial governor—William Franklin was marked as one of the handsomest men in America—by a heterogeneous body of humbler and homelier persons bent on freeing themselves from the government he represented, meant that in his person once more the world was to see a mighty empire brought to bay and forced inevitably to pay the price of mistakes in judgment, blunders in policy, blindness to opportunity.

Six questions were put to him; had he issued the proclamation of the thirtieth; did he know of the resolution of May 15 passed by the Continental Congress; what was his authority for calling the Assembly; what was the alleged "important business;" did he write to the British ministry encouraging them to proceed against the country and especially calling attention to the defencelessness of the coast; what did he mean by the threatening

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words he had used to Colonel Heard, as for example: "It is your turn now, but it will be mine another day"?

The governor refused to answer; he denied the authority of his inquisitors; he declared with obvious truth that they had usurped lawful government in the province; and he furthermore asserted that they had not treated him with gentlemen's courtesy but had resolved that he was an enemy to his country, had made him a prisoner, and had robbed him by depriving him of part of his salary; and he ended his speech with a flash of anger: "and now do as you please, and make the best of it!" Altogether, wrote Mr. Tucker to Mr. Hancock, the Governor's conduct was "gross and insolent," and it was the opinion of the New Jersey body that he ought to be confined, but not in the province he had been ruling. "Only one thing we beg leave to add, that in our opinion the sooner the Continental Congress take him in charge the better."

There is no doubt that the Governor lost his temper, and, under the circumstances, excusably. Dr. Ashbel Green, quoting his father, the Reverend Jacob Green, who was a member of the congress, corroborates the tradition that the Governor reminded his hearers of their lack of administrative experience and their probable unfitness to devise and carry on a new form of government; but the further tradition that he so far forgot his manners as to taunt his inquisitors with their humble birth is questionable. Dr. Green does not mention it in his narrative of the occasion obtained from his father and used in his manuscript biography of Dr. Witherspoon, although he refers to the story in his own autobiography written later. If, however, the Governor alluded sneeringly to the common characteristic of a large majority of his judges he made a blunder which he speedily regretted. For only a few feet away, nervously plucking at his bushy eyebrows as was his habit when excited, sat the head of the College of New Jersey. The Governor might have foreseen that the President would reply; he could not have been ignorant of his activity in the political crisis. President Witherspoon was angry; and Ashbel Green has left it on record that at such times "the Doctor's aspect was truly awful." Witherspoon's anger must have been worth hearing as well as seeing, even if he did fall back

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so completely into his native Scotch that the torrent of his invective was difficult to follow. What was his reply to the Governor is not known although it is said—by tradition—to have caused the boldest to hold his breath in astonishment.⁷ The Reverend Jacob Green used to relate that the President ended his tirade with the sarcastic fling “On the whole Sir, I think Governor Franklin has made a speech every way worthy his exalted birth and refined education.” Evidently Dr. Witherspoon too had lost his self-control; for, whatever mistakes Benjamin Franklin’s natural son may have made during his tumultuous career, he was hardly to blame for the irregular circumstances of his entrance into this difficult world. It is said—and it is probably true—that Dr. Witherspoon regretted his ungenerous thrust and later sought, but never found, opportunity to apologize.⁸

The rest of the Governor’s story is quickly told. He had hit off pretty accurately what the future held in store for him when some months before this he intimated to the Earl of Dartmouth that it would be extremely mortifying to be “seized upon and led like a Bear through the Country to some place of Confinement in N. E.” His New Jersey inquisitors received from the Continental Congress instructions to send him to Hartford, Connecticut, under close guard; and thither, a captive Ichabod, he was escorted. In November, 1778, he was exchanged, and going back to England resided there until his death in 1813.

Having disposed of their Governor, the Jerseymen turned their attention to their representatives in the Continental Congress. With the exception of William Livingston and Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant, the New Jersey delegation elected in February had not kept abreast of the movement for independence. Even Livingston, undoubted patriot though he was, had by no means yet convinced himself of the necessity of that measure. John Cooper seems to have taken part in nothing but a studied

⁷ Mellick, *Old Farm*, p. 300.

⁸ Messler, (*First Things in Old Somerset* p. 37) reports a modified version of the incident; when the Governor demanded by what authority he was so treated, Dr. Witherspoon on whom all eyes were turned, says Messler, replied that it could not be expected that a plain body of farmers and workingmen should treat the governor with all the politeness and respect which his illustrious birth and refined education would demand, but his judges meant to treat him civilly.

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silence. Richard Smith had requested leave to resign on the score of ill health and was followed by John DeHart who for the time relinquished his seat for family reasons. On June 21, the provincial congress appointed Livingston, much against his will, to the command of state militia; he would have preferred to remain in Congress. The following day, Sergeant, having wisely decided that he was more needed at home and could there do better work for the cause, also resigned. Cooper was tacitly ignored and an entirely new delegation was elected consisting of Abraham Clark, John Hart, Francis Hopkinson, Richard Stockton, and John Witherspoon. It was well known how each of these men stood on the question of independence, and what their instructions would be. A week before their election Sergeant had assured Mr. Adams that Jersey's new delegation would "vote plump" for independence. Hereafter there was to be no mistake.

For a Colony that was not supposed to value education any too highly,⁹ it was a very creditable delegation. Three of its members, Witherspoon, Stockton, and Hopkinson, were college graduates, had been in Europe, and had rubbed elbows with a wider society than that bounded by Jersey province lines. Born at Princeton in 1730 and graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1748, a member of the provincial council, a judge of the provincial supreme court, Mr. Stockton was at the zenith of his powers as lawyer, scholar and gentleman. It was an odd turn of fortune that he should be sitting beside the man whom he had brought ten years ago from the other side of the Atlantic for a very different purpose, and that both should now be engaged in overturning the government which at that time they had loyally supported.

Mr. Stockton's junior by seven years, Francis Hopkinson was English by parentage and Philadelphian by birth. He had received his bachelor's degree from the College of Philadelphia in 1757, like Stockton a member of the first class sent out by his alma mater; six years later Princeton had made him an honorary alumnus. As musician, as a writer of light verse and lover of art, as a lawyer, as director and secretary of the Philadelphia Library

⁹ Dr. Witherspoon used to say jokingly to Ashbel Green that he was the most popular man in the State that had any learning.

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Company, and as collector of customs at Newcastle on the Delaware, he was probably the most versatile member of the Congress, and had got into his small shrewd head—the head that John Adams made fun of—a world of experience that gave an edge to his natural fund of wit and imagination. His slight figure had been for two years a familiar one in New Jersey congresses.

Abraham Clark was a self-made man of fifty, a Jerseyman born and bred. He was a surveyor by profession, and had been sheriff of Essex county and clerk of the colonial Assembly. A warm adherent of the cause, he had served on the committee of observation in 1774 and in the provincial congress of 1775.

“Honest” John Hart of Hunterdon county, the oldest member of the group—he was baptised in March, 1714—was a farmer of little or no education. He was as rough a diamond as Stockton and Hopkinson were polished; but his simple, rugged character had so commanded the affection and trust of his neighbors that it had won him his nickname, had elected him to numerous offices, and for a decade past had sent him to the colonial Assembly. He had already served in the Continental Congress and in both the provincial congresses of New Jersey, and he was vice-president of the body that returned him to Philadelphia in June, 1776.

Thoroughly representative of their constituents in most ways though this group was, their departure from Burlington deprived the province of the presence of men whom it could ill spare from its own congress. We find a hint of the scarcity of experienced leaders in New Jersey in a letter which Jonathan D. Sergeant wrote to Mr. Adams some weeks later: he feels the want of wisdom in the state’s councils; raw, young, and inexperienced as he is, he finds himself forced to bear a principal part; “would to Heaven,” he cries, “that I could look round here, as when with you, and see a number in whose understanding I could confide.” But in New Jersey he finds a “miserable prejudice against men of education . . . plain men are generally returned, of sufficient honesty and spirit, but most of them hardly competent to the penning of a common vote.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Adams, *Life and Works*, vol. IX, p. 425. Letter of July 19, 1776.

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Competent or not, there was no mistaking New Jersey's meaning when she did finally, with Sergeant's aid, get her thoughts into writing, as the instructions given on June 21 to her delegates to the Continental Congress amply prove. And Sergeant himself was forced to admit that New Jersey was "mending very fast." East Jersey he told Mr. Adams had always been firm and West Jersey would now move with vigor. The Tories in some parts of the province had impeded the work of the Congress by delays and "an infinity of hearings," but a quick remedy had at last been provided by framing an ordinance against "treasons, seditions and counterfeittings," which Sergeant thought would effectually tie Tory hands and in any event check Tory tongues.

Dr. Witherspoon's appointment prevented him from serving New Jersey on the committee that drafted the state constitution and secured its adoption on July 2. It is generally asserted in histories of New Jersey that he took an active part in preparing this constitution, but the only evidence brought forward consists of the marks of clerical influence that the instrument bears. These may be more reasonably credited to the Reverend Jacob Green who was chairman of the drafting committee. Dr. Witherspoon was perhaps consulted, but his absence from New Jersey must have debarred him entirely from any active participation in the discussion and adoption of the constitution. It is a tradition that the document was drafted at "Constitution Hill," Princeton.

On Friday, June 28, 1776, Francis Hopkinson appeared before the Continental Congress at Philadelphia and produced the credentials of the New Jersey delegation reading as follows:

In Provincial Congress New Jersey.

Burlington June 21st 1776.

The Congress proceeded to the Election of Delegates to represent this Colony in Continental Congress when Richard Stockton, Abraham Clark, John Hart, and Francis Hopkinson, Esquires, and Doctr John Witherspoon were elected by Ballot to serve one Year unless a new Appointment be made before that Time

Resolved, that the following Instructions be given the Delegates elected as aforesaid:

To Richard Stockton, Abraham Clark, John Hart, and Francis

PRESIDENT WITHERSPOON

Hopkinson, Esqrs. and the Revd Doctr John Witherspoon Delegates appointed to represent the Colony of New Jersey in Continental Congress.

The Congress empower and direct you, in the Name of this Colony, to join with the Delegates of the other Colonies in Continental Congress, in the most vigorous Measures for supporting the just Rights and Liberties of America and, if you shall judge it necessary or expedient for this Purpose, we empower you to join with them in declaring the United Colonies independent of Great Britain, entering into a Confederacy for Union & common Defence, making Treaties with foreign Nations for Commerce and Assistance, and to take such other Measures as may appear to them and you necessary for these great Ends, promising to Support them with the whole Force of this Province; always observing, that, whatever Plan of Confederacy you enter into the regulating the internal Policy of this Province is to be reserved to the Colony Legislature.

Extract from the Minutes
Wm Paterson, Secy

By Order of Congress
Samul Tucker, president.¹¹

The minutes of the Continental Congress do not state that Mr. Hopkinson's fellowmembers were with him when he presented the credentials, but there seems to be no reason to misconstrue Mr. John Adams' statement in his autobiography that on this date (June 28) "A new delegation appeared from New Jersey,"¹² and we may be sure that Dr. Witherspoon had not needed more than a week to arrange matters at Princeton for his absence. It seems indubitable that he appeared at Philadelphia as soon as the rest of the delegation although the first autographic evidence of his presence in Philadelphia is a letter he wrote July 3 to President Tucker of New Jersey in regard to Governor Franklin.¹³

The Jerseymen arrived at an important moment. Not only was Congress, in committee of the whole, on the point of adopt-

¹¹ The credentials are among the Papers of the Continental Congress in the Library of Congress and are printed in the *Journal of the Continental Congress* edited by Worthington C. Ford. (V. 489). The original is in Paterson's handwriting except the signature of Mr. Tucker. It is endorsed by Paterson "Copy for Mr. Hopkinson" and by Charles Thomson, secretary of Congress, "Credentials of New Jersey," and is dated in another hand "21st June 1776."

¹² *Life and Works*, vol. III, p. 53.

¹³ *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. XXX, p. 313.

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ing a resolution of independence, but Friday morning, June 28, the special committee appointed to prepare a declaration of that independence brought in a draft which was read and ordered to lie on the table over Sunday. On Monday, July 1, the draft was referred also to the committee of the whole. The latter reported that it had agreed to the resolution of independence but desired leave to sit again. The resolution was then read again, but "at the request of a Colony," says the *Journal*, final disposition was postponed until the next day. It was also resolved that on the morrow Congress would in committee of the whole consider further "the declaration respecting independence." This agrees in general though not in detail with John Adams' statement under that date (July 1) that "before the final question (i.e., on the resolution) was put, the new delegation from New Jersey came in, and Mr. Stockton, Dr. Witherspoon and Mr. Hopkinson, very respectable characters, expressed a great desire to hear the arguments." The main debate had taken place; Mr. Dickinson had made his speech summing up against independence and Adams had replied. The house was weary of discussion, but Mr. Rutledge urged Mr. Adams to satisfy the Jerseymen, which he did concisely, giving the arguments pro and con. The Jerseymen declared themselves ready to vote, and on July 2 the vote was taken by which it was resolved "that these United Colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent States." Congress then went into committee of the whole on the declaration of this independence, discussion proceeded, lasting through July 3 to culminate on the fourth in the adoption, by the committee, of a declaration, which on being reported to the house was agreed to as "the unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America."

What share did Dr. Witherspoon have in the proceedings of these four memorable days? Lacking contemporary or autobiographical data on this point, the best source available at present is Dr. Ashbel Green's manuscript biography of the President. Referring to the part played by his revered teacher in the debate on independence, he says that the substance of a statement made by Dr. Witherspoon in his hearing was to the following effect:

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That the principal argument relied on by those who wished to postpone for a time the Declaration of Independence was that a number of new members had recently entered Congress who had not heard the whole of the previous discussion, and who could not therefore judge correctly of the reasons for and against an immediate declaration, which had been so ably advocated and urged before they took their seats and that the country at large needed more time for reflection and was not yet ripe for so important and decisive a measure. To this the Doctor took the opportunity to reply that, although there were some members who had recently come into Congress, it did by no means follow that they had not examined this important subject in all its bearings and weighed the arguments fully for prompt action on the one side, and for delay on the other; that this had certainly been done by himself, and he doubted not by others to whom the objection applied; nor had they wanted ample means of information on the merits of the question, although they had not been favored with hearing all the debate by that house. As for the country at large, it had been for some time past loud in its demand for the proposed declaration and in his judgment, it was not only ripe for the measure but in danger of becoming rotten for the want of it.¹⁴

We have nothing in the shape of a more personal record. That there is discrepancy between the Adams and the Green statements is obvious. Dr. Green is either confusing the declaration of the fourth with the resolution of the second, or is using the word "declaration" to mean the action of the second. The President's entire speech plainly refers to the resolution of the second, and not to the declaration of the fourth. It seems also clear that when the New Jersey delegates put in their appearance at the end of the debate on the resolution of independence, the point was made by the conservative party that there were a number of new members in Congress who had not heard the debate and for whose benefit, therefore, it should be recapitulated. Mr. Stockton and Mr. Hopkinson may have "expressed a great desire" to hear

¹⁴ Green MS. The same statement, in almost identical words, occurs in Dr. Green's autobiography (p. 62). It is fair to state that Dr. Green's biography of Dr. Witherspoon was written from 1836 to 1840 and that the passage in the autobiography was written probably in 1843, assuming that the date heading (July 20, 1848) of the chapter is a misprint inasmuch as its author died in May 1848. The accuracy of Dr. Green's recollections in incidents which are capable of exact verification leads the present writer to accept the reliability of his statement in this case.

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the arguments, as Mr. Adams has it; he declares twice that New Jersey desired recapitulation and there is evidence in the biography of Mr. Stockton that he at least was undecided until he heard Mr. Adams;¹⁵ but Mr. Adams must be entirely mistaken in including Dr. Witherspoon with those desiring further debate. That he would have opposed longer delay his previous record sufficiently proves. It was certainly on July 1 or 2 that he made the speech of which Dr. Green has preserved the outline.

The way being cleared for the declaration which already had been under discussion for two days, President Witherspoon is said to have protested against the use of the word "Scotch" in the phrase "Scotch and foreign mercenaries,"¹⁶ used in the original draft and omitted in the final form of the declaration; and he protested, as he always did, against calling the King a tyrant, etc., as being false and undignified.

That on the fourth of July, at an alleged critical moment in the debate, he stepped into the breach and delivered the "nick of time" speech, traditionally credited to him and inscribed on his monuments in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, and at Washington, is a legend. There is no trustworthy evidence that he spoke on the declaration of independence save to criticize successfully some of its original phraseology.¹⁷

¹⁵Sanderson, *Signers*, p. 192. There is also evidence elsewhere that imprisonment and ill health later sapped his courage for the cause.

¹⁶Lee, *Life of R. H. Lee*, vol. I, 176.

¹⁷The tradition has become so firmly entrenched in the popular mind that a disbelief in its authenticity deserves more than mere assertion. The problem of this speech has been made the subject of a close and able study by Dr. Louis F. Benson, Honorary Librarian of the Presbyterian Historical Society, published in the *Journal of the Society* for June, 1916. The conclusions reached by Dr. Benson are with slight exception identical with those reached by the present writer some years since and suggested in a local address. Since then this chapter has lain in manuscript awaiting the completion of the volume of which it is a part. The delay has happily given it the benefit of useful details from Dr. Benson's later researches.

The grounds for disbelief in the tradition are that the alleged pivotal appeal by President Witherspoon was unknown to his contemporaries and unmentioned by himself, is not in his manner, does not ring true, and owes its existence to a confusion and distortion of facts. In what is perhaps its most familiar form the alleged speech is found in Dr. William P. Breed's *Presbyterians and the Revolution*, published at the time of the Centennial in 1876. Dr. Breed's source was a sermon entitled *Merciful Rebukes* delivered in 1841 by Dr. John M. Krebs and published in New York that year. Dr. Krebs himself, however, was also quoting, as reference to his sermon

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proves; but he did not name his source. Dr. Thomas Smyth's *Ecclesiastical Republicanism*, printed in 1843, also uses the Krebs version. A footnote in the Philadelphia 1846 edition of Graydon's *Memoirs*, not found in earlier editions, quotes a highly colored passage in an address "by the Reverend S. S. Templeton," which contains the speech. Mr. Templeton's oration has not been traced, but the identity of his version with that of Dr. Krebs leads to the conclusion that the latter was also his source.

The *Presbyterian* for September 21, 1867, states that the speech is found in an oration by the Reverend Hooper Cumming delivered July 4, 1824, at Morristown, N. J. This is an error both of date and place, for the oration was delivered at Newark, N. J., on July 4, 1822. The report there given constitutes the earliest form of the alleged speech at present known. Comparison of the texts shows that it is almost certainly the source used by Dr. Krebs. Like those who followed him, however, Dr. Cumming was quoting or at least paraphrasing. For he only claims to have been "credibly informed" that Dr. Witherspoon uttered the speech he proceeds to report, and it is fairly evident, therefore, that he is not trying to repeat the exact language.

The passage runs as follows (he is speaking of the Continental Congress): "And it must be a source of proud exultation to a Jersey man that one of the Representatives of his native State by a laconic speech signalized for its energy, its disinterestedness, and its burning patriotism, turned the scale which was at that moment equipoise, and decided the passage of the Declaration of Independence. 'There is,' as I have been credibly informed, 'there is,' said the venerable Witherspoon, when he perceived the house wavering, 'there is a tide in the affairs of men—a nick of time.— We perceive it now before us. To hesitate, is to consent to slavery. That noble instrument upon your table, which ensures immortality to its author, should be subscribed this very morning by every pen in this house. He who will not respond to its accents, and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions, is unworthy the name of freeman. For my own part, of property I have some—of reputation more. That reputation is staked on the issue of this contest—that property is pledged. And although these gray hairs must soon descend into the sepulchre, I had infinitely rather they would descend thither by the hands of the public executioner, than desert, at this crisis, the sacred cause of my country.' The Declaration was signed by every member present—and the heart of the illustrious Jefferson palpitated with joy."

Comparison of the later versions with that of Mr. Cumming shows that it supplies all the necessary hints for the fanciful touches found in those versions. Dr. Krebs for example embroiders the Cumming reference to the scale being at that moment "equipoise" and the "house wavering" into this: "The House hesitated, wavered, and for a while liberty and slavery appeared to hang in even scale." To which Mr. Templeton adds: "Silence, deep and solemn silence, reigned throughout the spacious Capitol," which seems to refer prophetically to Washington, D. C. The "venerable Witherspoon" and his "burning patriotism" is expanded into: "An aged patriarch arose, a venerable and stately form, his head white with the frosts of many years . . . the hue of age was lost in the flush of burning patriotism that fired his cheek." Then follows the speech, Templeton omitting two sentences but otherwise without change from Krebs. The improvements on Mr. Cumming may be dismissed without further ado since they spring from his unwitting temptation of his followers and because they contain their own refutation. One example will suffice. The characterization of President Witherspoon as an "aged patriarch" whose head was "white with the frosts of many years" becomes ridiculous when we remember that he had but recently passed his fifty-third birthday, and even though it be admitted that he looked older than he was.

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But the Cumming original itself lacks conviction. Mr. Cumming was a graduate of Princeton in the Class of 1805 and therefore could not have obtained his information from the President himself. He may have received it from one of the President's colleagues of July 4, 1776; in which case it is not difficult to understand why the recollection of this supposed contemporary was confused. He makes a mistake similar to that of Dr. Green and assigns to July 4 a speech which if made at all was delivered on July 2. At best it cannot be and is hardly intended to be an exact reproduction of Dr. Witherspoon's words; its style is in every way markedly unlike that of any used by the President in his authentic speeches. The allusion to the noble instrument lying on the table ensuring "immortality to its author" is too prophetic for 1776, the historic action in contemporary eyes being that of July 2 and not any action taken on the fourth. Dr. Witherspoon could scarcely have spoken of deserting the sacred cause of his adopted country at this juncture; he had already voted for the vital resolution of independence and his position toward the cause as shown by his recorded speech and vote was now beyond recall, and the question at the moment did not involve desertion; that Rubicon, in the well-known words of Mr. Adams, had been crossed on July 2, and now it was merely a question of public declaration of the reasons leading to that action. Finally, Dr. Witherspoon must have been sufficiently familiar with the procedure of the Congress to have been aware that the declaration as a committee report would, if adopted, be signed only by the president and attested by the secretary of Congress unless the Congress should order otherwise, and Congress had not yet so ordered. The declaration was not signed generally until the engrossed copy was brought in some weeks later for that express purpose and according to subsequent resolution of Congress, Witherspoon himself signing in August.

The alleged incident, which Cumming would have us believe swung the vote in favor of the declaration of July 4, is not mentioned in any account of the debate written by a contemporary; it is not hinted at in Ashbel Green's autobiography nor in his manuscript life of Witherspoon both of which contain the latter's own account of his part in the final debate; and no such speech is preserved in Dr. Witherspoon's printed writings. It is incredible that so important an utterance, if made, should have been overlooked by those who were present and who recorded the proceedings, or that Green should not only have failed to hear of it but should have failed to take note of it.

Mr. John Adams' statement in 1815, in a letter to Governor McKean, that Dickinson and Witherspoon each printed a speech delivered in Congress on the declaration of independence (Stille, *Life and times of Dickinson*, vol. I, p. 193) seems to be inaccurate as regards Mr. Dickinson and is erroneous as regards President Witherspoon.

The speech is most probably a vague recollection of President Witherspoon's remarks on July 2 opposing further delay in adopting the resolution of independence, but so distorted by oral tradition, the passage of time, and the gradual magnifying of the proceedings of July 4, that it had become unrecognizable when it reached Mr. Cumming's willing ears and was transformed into a supposed speech of July 4. The story has every quality of misguided information or misinformed enthusiasm and is an excellent example of the growth of legend around ascertained facts. In this case the facts are two: first, the arrival of new delegates in Congress at the end of June, 1776, delayed until July 2 a vote on the resolution of independence while the preceding debate was recapitulated for their benefit; and second, President Witherspoon spoke at the beginning of this delay denying its necessity and urging an immediate vote.

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The Declaration of Independence reached Princeton on July 9 and that night the undergraduates once more placed tallow dips in every window of Nassau Hall so that the building was "grandly illuminated," and amid triple volleys of musketry "Independence was proclaimed with universal acclamation for the prosperity of the United States. The ceremony was conducted with the greatest decorum."¹⁸

Dr. Witherspoon's recent actions had not been unnoticed by the other side. In New Jersey he was known to half the inhabitants by sight; in Philadelphia he had long been a familiar figure; his opinions and his readiness to utter them anywhere outside of the pulpit were commonplaces; British troops on Long Island showed an unexpected sense of humor when they prepared for their bonfire of July 30 an effigy of him haranguing similar effigies of Generals Washington, Lee, and Putnam, standing before him mutely in a row; and Dr. Odell's estimate was not an extreme example of loyalist attitude toward him; but his severest critics were his own countrymen abroad. In 1775 he had been attacked in the Edinburgh *Caledonian Mercury* by a writer, hiding behind the pseudonym of "Historicus," who, having read a British reprint of Provost Smith's sermon at Philadelphia on June 23, sent to the *Mercury* a long account of the preacher's varied career up to that time, in the course of which he asserted that, next to his countryman Dr. Witherspoon, he was generally considered to be the clergyman who in the middle provinces had taken most violent part in the present differences between Great Britain and her Colonies. This is one of the earliest European references to Witherspoon's share in the shaping of affairs that has been found, and it would hardly occur to any one now to place the two Presidents in the same category on this score. The Reverend Dr. John Erskine in the *Mercury's* next issue took up the cudgel in defence of his absent friend Witherspoon. The American clergy he declares have not influenced the people nor urged them to violence; they have neither printed nor preached on political topics; Witherspoon's letters to Erskine and to others have been couched in terms of great restraint and modera-

¹⁸Letter from Princeton July 10 in *New Jersey Archives*, 2 series, vol. I, p. 142.

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tion and show instances of his having done all he could to allay animosities and disorders. The issue of the *Scots Magazine* that quoted this letter from the *Mercury* prints the "Pastoral Letter" of May, 1775, which we know came from Witherspoon's pen, and is certainly not an inflammatory document.

From his foreign critics President Witherspoon's fast day sermon of May, 1776, on the *Dominion of Providence* received close attention. When he published it late in July he took the opportunity to add as an appendix an *Address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America*, which is invaluable in its revelation of his political views at this time.¹⁹ Besides indicating that he now considered the controversial phase of the situation closed and its decision irrevocable, the *Address* contains much of the cool reasoning that had led him to his present position. It shows how little he had been carried off his feet by mere emotionalism and suggests more fully than even his then unpublished essay "*On the American Controversy about Independence*," the views he held as to the significance of the struggle in which the Colonies were now embarked.

The *Address* is composed very largely of ideas, and in part of phraseology, borrowed from his unfinished *Reflections on the Present State of Public Affairs*. It had given him great uneasiness to hear the word "Scotch" used as a term of reproach during the American controversy, "which could be explained only upon the supposition that Scotsmen were more generally opposed to American liberty than the English or the Irish." Admitting that possibly in some provinces, the natives of Scotland have been "too much inclined to support the usurpations of the parent State," he proposed first to "endeavour to account for it, by assigning some of its probable causes, and then offer a few considerations which should induce them to wipe off the aspersion entirely by a contrary conduct."

¹⁹ The fact that he deemed it wise to address this large group of colonial inhabitants shows that he feared for their adherence to the colonial cause. He may have heard of the formation of Highland regiments in the Colonies to serve the Crown, and he may have had an inkling of the situation in Scotland where scores of loyal addresses were showered on the Crown at this time—one from his former parish, Paisley. J.P. Maclean, *Historical Account of Scotch Highlanders in America*, (1900) pp. 299-300.

²⁰ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 201.

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The first and radical cause was the confusion in the minds of friends of liberty in many places in America between the American cause and that of John Wilkes. It is clear, he avers, that "till very lately" those who seemed to take the part of America in Parliament never did so on American principles. The truth was that

by far the greater part of the countenance given in Britain to the complaints of this country, was by those who had no other intention in it, than to use them as an engine of opposition to the Ministry. . . . Some have now learned to reason very justly, and upon the most liberal principles; but their number is not great, and it was not the case with any one speaker or writer whose works I have had the opportunity of perusing, till the very last stage of the quarrel.

The Wilkites used the American troubles to sharpen their own tirades against the government. The effect of "Wilkism (if I may so speak)" on the Scotch is easily explained: Wilkes and his party had ever hated and insulted the Scotch and had stirred up jealousy between Scotland and England. Hence the supposed Scotch apathy, to call it by no harsher name, toward the American cause. He is far from admitting this a good reason "for any man's being cool to the American cause, which was as different from that of Wilkes as light is from darkness." It was doing great dishonor to a noble struggle "to suppose it to have any connection with—who should be in or out of court favour at London." "In order to justify the American opposition, it is not necessary to show that the persons in power have invaded liberty in Britain; it is sufficient to say that they, with the concurrence of the whole nation, have refused to suffer it to continue in the Colonies."

This brings him to the second part of his plan—to lay before his readers the reasons which in his opinion should induce every lover of justice and of mankind, not only to be a well wisher, but a firm and steadfast friend to America in this contest. The progress of the British Colonies has been far greater than that of settlements of other European nations. This cannot be ascribed to climate, for they are of all climates; nor to the people, for they are a mixture of all nations. "It must, therefore, be resolved singly into the degree of British liberty which they brought from

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home, and which pervaded more or less their several constitutions." It had been repeatedly said "by mercenary, short-sighted writers in favour of submission to, or re-union with, Great Britain, that we have thriven very much in past time, by our dependence on the mother country and therefore we should be loath to part. These writers forget that the very complaint is that she will not suffer us to enjoy our ancient rights." He challenges such reasoners to prove that in exercising these rights "we have thriven by our dependence, and not by the degree of independence we have hitherto enjoyed." On the contrary, those provinces have thriven most which have enjoyed the freest form of government. Hence how can any person of liberal mind wish "that this great and growing country" should be brought back to a state of subjection to a distant power? "It ought in my opinion to meet with the cordial approbation of every impartial person, as I am confident it will of posterity, that they [the Colonies] have united for common defence, and resolved that they will be free and independent because they cannot be the one without the other."

He next proposes to show that independence was necessary, that it will be honorable and profitable, and that in all probability it will work not injury but a real advantage to Great Britain. Independence was necessary because reconciliation except upon terms of unconditional submission had been refused by Great Britain; things had gone so far that it was impossible to lay down a scheme by which Great Britain should be sure of our dependence, and the Colonies at the same time secured in their liberties. Independence will be both honorable and profitable to the country—he passes over commerce and other material advantages, in order to "dwell a little on the great and leading benefit, which is the foundation of all the rest. We shall have the opportunity of forming plans of government, upon the most rational, just, and equal principles." He had long looked upon this "with a kind of enthusiastic satisfaction." The case never happened before, since the world began.

All governments we have read of in former ages were settled by caprice or accident, by the influence of prevailing parties or particular

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parties, or presented by a conqueror. . . . But to see a government, in large and populous countries, settled from its foundation by deliberate counsel, and directed immediately to the public good of the present and future generations, while the people are waiting for the decision with full confidence in the wisdom and impartiality of those to whom they have committed the important trust, is certainly new.

And so far there has been great unanimity and public spirit. The inhabitants of every province and persons of all denominations had vied with one another in zeal for the common interest. In England at the time of the Civil War if the Parliamentary party "had settled on a regular form of Government as soon as the parliament had obtained an evident superiority their liberties would never have been shaken and the Revolution would have been unnecessary. But by delaying the thing too long they were broken into parties, and bewildered in their views, and at last tamely submitted, without resistance, to that very tyranny against which they had fought with so much glory and success." Hence he rejoices at the measures lately taken by the States of America and especially at the declaration of independence, "as it will not only give union and force to the measures of defence while they are necessary, but lay a foundation for the birth of millions, and the future improvement of a great part of the globe."

Thirdly, the independence of America will be a real advantage to Great Britain partly in trade, but most in the influence Great Britain will have in peopling and enriching this great continent. "Trade is of a nice and delicate nature; it is founded upon interest. It will force its way wherever interest leads, and can hardly by any act be made to go in another direction." If American trade has been valuable in the past how much more valuable may it become to Great Britain when the country shall be still more highly improved? There is not now, nor has there ever been, among Americans any aversion to the people to Great Britain, "so that they may be sure of our trade if they treat us as well as others; and if otherwise, they do not deserve it."

These in brief are the principles on which he thought the cause of the American Colonies ought to be pleaded; and on the principle of majority rule, there was a time when it was not only just

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and consistent but needful that every one should speak his mind freely and fully on the necessity or expediency of resisting Great Britain; but that time is gone long ago, and now America is no place for the half-hearted man or the neutral—in a leaking ship the half-hearted man who will not help at the pumps but only carps and hinders, should be thrown into the sea “in less time than I have taken to state the case.” He himself has been abused in the papers at home for the part he has taken and this *Address* is partly in reply to those criticisms. He hopes that an honest and faithful support of liberty and equal government in this part of the world will be no just reproach to his character as a scholar, a minister, or a Christian, and that it will be perfectly consistent with an undiminished regard for the country that gave him birth.

The sermon on the *Dominion of Providence* with the *Address* was reprinted at Glasgow twice in 1777, with an introduction and notes signed by “S.R.,” the publisher’s and printer’s names not being given. The editor calls attention to the belief among “many persons of the best intelligence” that the trouble in the Colonies has been “considerably promoted, if not primarily agitated, by clerical influence,” and none has had a greater share in this commotion ascribed to him than Witherspoon, “though not credited by many of his favourites in this country.” To justify the allegation and silence the President’s friends is the editor’s object in reprinting the sermon and its appendix. In the former are blended “the most rebellious sentiments with the most sacred and important truths;” the author had “the audacity to affirm, that not only the temporal but eternal happiness of the revolted colonists depends upon persevering in their independence, and undauntedly opposing the arms of their lawful sovereign.” Witherspoon proves himself the most inveterate enemy of his King and country; he stretches every nerve to induce his countrymen to imbibe his political sentiments; and that his rebellious tenets may be diffused through the different Colonies his sermon and address “must be printed and published, and dedicated to the chief of the rebel faction;” he exerts his utmost abilities to instigate the deluded colonists to persevere in their rebellious course; he labors to inflame their minds against the determinations of Parliament; “the best of Kings hath the most vile and unjust

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epithets ascribed to him; the salutary and equitable Acts of the British parliament are pronounced unjust and tyrannical; the ablest of ministers are represented as corrupt, cruel, and oppressive; the most lenient measures of the government are flouted at and treated with contempt; the mildest of commanders and the best disciplined army are painted out as barbarous, inhuman, and brutal"—and so forth, ending with the warning that if Witherspoon "falls into the hands of Government and meets with the demerit of his offence, he hath justly and deservedly procured it to himself." The notes scattered copiously through the reprint are as extreme in tone as the preface.

At London the sermon and *Address* were reprinted separately and show interesting contrast to the Glasgow editions. Notes are designedly omitted, says the anonymous English editor of the sermon, the purpose being not

to inflame the minds of readers against present measures of Government but to inculcate the great moral and religious instructions which the sermon contains for persons of all parties who if they will read without prejudice must acknowledge that whatever the truth with regard to the present unhappy contest between Great Britain and America, the discourse contains many admirable hints of advice, which if properly regarded will tend to the prosperity of both sides. And it is hoped, that the decency and moderation which so warm and interested an advocate on the part of the Americans discovers, may tend to promote the same spirit in those readers on this side of the Atlantic, who have made themselves parties in the same cause, as well as to moderate the resentment of their most zealous opponents; and to promote in good men, on both sides, (for such there are on both) an hearty disposition "to seek the things which make for Peace" and above all to promote the Righteousness "which alone exalteth a nation."

The London edition of the *Address* likewise contained a brief but not unfriendly preface. While many of Dr. Witherspoon's readers and friends in Great Britain who wish well to American liberty will be disgusted at his pleading the cause of American independence, others will wish America independent though utterly disapproving the measures taken to make it so. As far, however, as the *Address* has a real tendency to the honor of the

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Crown and the interests of the British empire, which is one of Dr. Witherspoon's objects in pleading for independence, so far it has the good wishes of the editor. Which was a kinder introduction, one suspects, than Dr. Stiles of New Haven would have written; for in the latter's diary for August 15, 1776, he takes note of President Witherspoon's assertion that American independence would redound to the advantage of Great Britain, and that after peace had been restored the Colonies would resume trade with the mother country, and adds the comment: "I doubt. Too much Scotticism! He wants to save his countrymen, who have behaved most cruelly in this American conflict."²¹

If the London reprint is neutral, the *Monthly Review's*²² comment is distinctly friendly.²³

Dr. Witherspoon is a character well known. He is a man of considerable abilities, a little tinctured with fanaticism of the Whitfieldian complexion. Some years ago we had frequent occasion of mentioning his writings published while he was a minister in Scotland, his native country. He is now become an eminent preacher among the Americans. This discourse, however, has nothing in it irrational or illiberal. It abounds more in piety than politics; though by no means destitute of the latter; but his doctrines in both respects breathe a spirit so candid and so agreeable to the moderation of the Christian character that, excepting few passages tending to encourage the Americans in their scheme of independency, this animated and pious discourse might have been delivered with great acceptance and possibly with good effect before any Fast Day audience in the Kingdom without subjecting the preacher to the imputation of disloyalty or disaffection to the government.

The *Scots Magazine* for February, 1777, quotes in seven columns, without comment, the political passages of the sermon, and must have contributed largely to the interest that demanded

²¹ *Literary Diary*, vol. II, p. 41.

²² *Monthly Review*, vol. LVIII (1778), p. 246.

²³ In the volume for 1757, p. 185, the *Review* had concluded a two page synopsis of his *Essay on the Connection between the doctrine of Justification and holiness of life* with this pleasant remark: "Judge for thyself, Reader, whether this rant savours anything of the genius of Christianity, and what share their author has of that amiable spirit of candor and charity which the Christian religion so strongly recommends and enforces."



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a second edition of the Glasgow reprint in the same year. The March number of the *Scots Magazine* reprints the *Address* in full and again without comment but giving it the leading place in that issue, and following it with a further extract from the sermon, consisting of Witherspoon's note attacking the author of *Common Sense* for representing the doctrine of original sin as "an object of contempt or abhorrence." A subtler, although unsuccessful, bid for Scottish favor could not have been selected. In the issue of the *Scots Magazine* for October, 1777, a correspondent ironically endorses the passage in the *Address* in which Witherspoon had intimated that Chatham's plan of reconciliation would not have been acceptable to America, remarking that Chatham and other noble lords might have saved themselves much trouble if they had only had the advantage of perusing Dr. Witherspoon's essay before they framed their plan. The correspondent also objects to the President's ethics:

St. Paul says the damnation of those who do evil that good may come is just. Dr. Witherspoon on the contrary says that if the colonists were wrong in the present contest it would be the part both of generosity and justice, in a certain class of persons, to support them effectually in it. The Apostle condemns evil when done that good may come; the Doctor would justify evil even when done in support of what is wrong.

These quotations indicate the feeling stirred up by the *Fast Day Sermon* and its accompanying *Address*; but probably the most curious example of the mood in which some of his countrymen viewed Dr. Witherspoon's American activities is found in the shape of a nineteen page quarto pamphlet entitled *The XLV Chapter of the Prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer, in Verse*, written by Hugo Arnot,²⁴ published anonymously at Edinburgh in 1776, and sold at sixpence a copy. Arnot was a well-known Edinburgh character, a local historian of repute, and an Advocate with a caustic tongue. The introduction, in the form of a dedicatory letter to "Dr. Silverspoon, Preacher of Sedition in America" and

²⁴So pencilled note on the title page of the unique copy in the Advocates Library at Edinburgh.

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written in prose that is infinitely cleverer than the poetry it introduces, informs him that

the design of this publication is to arouse my sleeping countrymen, to alarm them with imaginary dangers, to blast and eradicate harmony and loyalty, which at present unhappily flourish among this deluded people; to clog the wheels of government, nay, to join hands with our brethren in America, and overturn the system.

These being the laudable and professed intentions of this work, I should be insensible to your merit, and ungrateful for your services, did I hesitate a moment in laying it at your feet, and acknowledging your eminence in influencing the people to take arms against government.

The author then proceeds to explain "the whole mystery of rebellion." Rebellion is due to drunkenness, and drunkenness in turn is of two sorts, natural and political, the former due to liquor, the latter to zeal. Political drunkenness

is distributed by those of desperate fortune and counsel, by the victims of disappointed ambition, by discontented pretenders to patriotism in the Houses of Peers and Commons, by needy authors; but above all by seditious Preachers, who gain an honest livelihood by exerting their respective endeavours, conducive to the same end, namely the destruction of their country.

Now, there are two ways of dissipating this drunken zeal; by a hearty drubbing, or by being crowned with success. If we shall attain the latter of these alternatives, our honourable purpose, if we shall no longer have Britain, to contend with, it is to be dreaded that the delirium will cease, that the people will turn sober, will perceive the nakedness of their situation, exposed to internal dissention and foreign invasion, and following the example set them in the Scriptures, will say, "I will arise and go to my Father, etc."

The author wishes he could send Dr. Silverspoon more agreeable news from this "deluded kingdom." "We are not, however, totally destitute of friends; a majority of smugglers are in favour of us, and some high-flying clergy in a certain city have betrayed their affection to our cause." He entreats the doctor to continue his correspondence "with the wizard brethren;" they will publish letters in the *Caledonian Mercury* until they get a magazine of

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their own, "replete with inflammatory stores; and in these letters they will applaud his 'great temper and moderation on the present melancholy state of affairs' and will assure the public, that he has 'neither preached nor printed on political subjects.'"

We need quote but a few lines of the poem itself—which is completely equipped with a panoply of notes and commentaries, in ironical respect to "the genius of the age."

In distant climes in days of yore,
Four holy wizard Brethren bore
Descent, of horrible conjunction,
Of parent Gods, reverse in function.
Lord Mercury, after might pother,
Seduced Discordia their mother,
The breth'ren hence were famed for lies,
Sedition and malignant eyes,
Practised their mother's cheating arts,
And threw their mother's rankled darts,
To blast the concord of a nation
Whose laws they held in destestation.

The four wizards meet, and borrowing from an obvious source sing an incantation, each muttering a stanza, of which the first is a sufficiently fair example:

In a brazen pulpit boil,
Of flaming zeal the holy oil;
Throw the seeds of harsh pretensions
Tongue of Preacher on damnation,
To a snoring congregation:
Cimeter that with a blow
Laid the tyrant Charles low.

And each stanza is followed by a chorus:

Double, double, toil and trouble
Make our brazen pulpit bubble.

As the last chorus ends "a monster huge" flies out of the pulpit—

Its wings expanded dully flew,
Scattering sharp corrosive dew.

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Sedition springs up wherever this dew falls, and the wizards continue their song:

We shall rejoice when good kings bleed,
When to change administration
We embroil the British nation,
Holding kings in detestation
More firmly than our creed.
But see, thro silver moonlight gliding,
Horrid hags in triumph riding,
Bringing news of joyful tiding,
From Discord's dreary dome.
Lo they bring from coast Atlantic,
Where fears ideal, yet gigantic,
Have render'd a whole nation frantic,
The gentle Silverspoon.

But now, that we open so splendid a vein,
Our verse must assume an heroic strain,
To you our Apostle, all hail, and all hail,
Who with red flaming fire-brands a people assail.
Sure no man (this century) has trumpeted further
Our favourite causes of treason and murder;
You have boldly supported the doctrine we hold
"That our King and our God were made to be sold"
We shall justify both by the gallant behaviour
Of the people who murder'd their king and their Saviour.
A king should be kill'd, says historic description,
When his right to the throne is fix'd by prescription:
Besides, shall we ever incur the disgrace,
To raise no rebellion for thirty years space?
To arms, to arms, sound Discord's alarms:
Our pen and our pulpit shall rouse us to arms.

One skips willingly several pages of similar verse, and at length finds the production ending with a song in celebration of the approaching downfall of "Thistle, Crown and Rose," due chiefly to the efforts of the American Apostle of Sedition.

President Witherspoon's writings of this period were not confined to sermons and addresses. It will be remembered that Dr. Jonathan Odell accused him of attempting to convert Tories lan-

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guishing in patriot jails. There is no evidence that he followed so patient a procedure. On the contrary, two or three of his productions show feeling of just the opposite sort. His "Supplication of James Rivington"²⁵ is an alleged plea by the well-known Tory printer of New York for the protection of Congress when the British evacuated the city, and is full of the most biting satire. He had even less sympathy for turncoats, and therefore more personal still is his "Recantation of Benjamin Towne,"²⁶ printer of the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, a newspaper for which the President used to write. This companion piece to the "Supplication" was composed in Aitken's bookshop at Philadelphia when Towne, on the return of Congress after the British left the city, asked Witherspoon to continue his contributions. The doctor refused, says Isaiah Thomas,²⁷ the historian of American printing, unless Towne, who had gone over to the British side, would publish an acknowledgment of his fault, make profession of repentance, and ask forgiveness of his fellow countrymen. Towne willingly agreed to print such a statement if Dr. Witherspoon would write it, whereupon the President dashed off the "Recantation." But Towne did not carry out the bargain and Dr. Witherspoon published the document in the *New York Packet*.²⁸

Towne is represented as admitting that he used to print the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* and professed to be a firm friend of American liberty; that when the British took Philadelphia he turned completely around and called Congress and its adherents rebels, rascals, ragamuffins "and several other unsavoury names;" that now he wishes to turn once more in favor of the United States, "which are likely to be uppermost." He never pretended to be "a man of character, repute, or dignity," hence his change of sides is not surprising; had a Hancock or an Adams changed they would deserve no quarter; but to pass judgment on an obscure printer is "miserable reasoning." Therefore he suggests that he be not hanged. For after all, he printed for Congress purely from love of gain, not for love of liberty; he had no

²⁵ *Works*, vol. IV, p. 359.

²⁶ *Works*, vol. III, p. 607.

²⁷ *History of Printing in America*, vol. II, p. 75.

²⁸ Issue for October 1, 1778.

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more regard for General Howe than for Congress, and it was not true that he had printed bigger lies for the British than for Congress; he should be given a chance to show what he can do. And he therefore concludes: "I do hereby recant, draw back, eat in, and swallow down every word that I have ever spoken, written, or printed to the prejudice of the United States of America."

Dr. Witherspoon's bitterest and boldest satire, however, was his *Caspipina's Catechism*, directed against the celebrated Rev. Jacob Duché, author of the *Caspipina Letters* and chaplain of Congress until the British reached Philadelphia when he, like Towne, became a supporter of the Crown. The *Catechism* was unpublished in Witherspoon's lifetime and is found among his papers now in the Library of Congress. According to Mr. Woods, who first printed it in part in his biography of the President, the latter was not suspected of its authorship. The complete text reads:

Question. Who is a Fop ?

Answer. The Rev. J. Duché.

Q. What is your Reason for that Opinion ?

A. Because he walks the Street in the Habit of a Clergyman with the Gestures of a *Petit Maître*.

Q. Who is a Turncoat ?

A. The Rev. Jacob Duché.

Q. What is your Reason for that Opinion ?

A. Because the late Chaplain of the Congress has entered with Zeal into the service of Sir Wm. Howe.

Q. Who is a Robber ?

A. The Rev. etc.

Q. What is, etc. ?

A. Because he pocketed the Money of the United States when of his own Shewing he was an Enemy to their Cause.

Q. Was he Singular in that Practice ?

A. I do not say that he was, but though there are more Robbers than one, any Robber deserves the Gallows.

Q. Who is a Hypocrite ?

A. The Rev. etc.

Q. What is, etc. ?

A. Because he accepted his Office as Chaplain after the Declaration of Independence.

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- Q. Who is a Fool ?
A. The Rev. etc.
- Q. What is, etc. ?
A. Because he attempted to Shew that his Conduct was not absurd and inconsistent.
- Q. What else could he do ?
A. He should have alledged Necessity or confessed his Roguery.
- Q. Who is a Blasphemer ?
A. The Rev. etc.
- Q. What is, etc. ?
A. Because for a long Tract of Time he solemnly called upon Almighty God conscious of the Insincerity of his own Heart. A Citizen & Traitor is to blame, a Soldier & Traitor is a Rogue, a Chaplain & Traitor is a Blasphemer.
- Q. Who is a Pedant ?
A. The Rev. etc.
- Q. What is, etc. ?
A. We ought to judge thus of him from the Book which he published & all the Sermons which he preached, Yet ought we most chiefly so to do from his lofty & sonorous Congress Prayers against the british Tyrant.
- Q. Who is a Sychophant ?
A. The Rev. etc.
- Q. What is, etc. ?
A. Because he used to lick the Feet of Mr. Hancock & the New England Delegates whom he has abused.
- Q. Who is a vain conceited Creature ?
A. The Rev. etc.
- Q. What is, etc. ?
A. Because he thought he had Authority, Interest & Eloquence sufficient to persuade Gen. Washington to wound his own Honour & betray his Country's Cause.
- Q. Who is a Liar ?
A. The Rev. etc.
- Q. What is, etc. ?
A. Because he affirms that the Committee's Acct. of their Conference with L. Howe is not true although it is justified by the London Gazette.
- Q. Who is an Ass ?
A. The Rev. etc.
- Q. What is, etc. ?

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- A.* Because he set his Name to his Letter. He was a Rogue to conceive it, a Coxcomb to write it, but an Ass to set his Name to it.
- Q.* How comes it that so many Inconsistencies meet in one Man ?
- A.* I can give no other Account of it but that if God Almighty has given a Man a topsy turvy understanding, no created Power will ever be able to set it right End uppermost.
- Q.* What was your Opinion of him before?
- A.* That he was a weak superficial—& his empty Flashes hardly merited Attention.
- Q.* What is your Opinion of him now ?
- A.* That he is a Wretch without Principle, without Parts, without Prudence, & that by an unexpected Effort he has crept up from the Ground Floor of Contempt to the first Story of Detestation.

