

SELECTIONS FROM LETTERS RECEIVED BY DAVID
DAGGETT, 1786-1802.

COMMUNICATED BY FRANKLIN B. DEXTER.

THE following extracts are selected from the correspondence of Chief Justice David Daggett, in the possession of the Library of Yale University.

Judge Daggett was born in Attleborough, Mass., in 1764, and was graduated at Yale in 1783. He remained in New Haven, as a student and practitioner of law, and early became prominent as a leader of the Connecticut Federalists.

The first extract presented is from a letter of a classmate on his return from a prospecting tour in the South. He finally settled in Philadelphia.

“BALTIMORE, Oct. 13th, 1786.

* * I have lived a very roving life, since my last confab with you, and tho' it hath turned out nothing better than barely satiating my curiosity, yet I consider myself richly paid. I find not so great a disparity between the Northern and Southern States as I expected, before I made my tour. I find in them neither rivers of gold nor rocks of diamonds, neither are we fed with the quails of heaven nor with the manna that comes down from above. But the curse is entailed upon the people in this climate as well as in New England—‘with the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread.’

North Carolina which hath been the Elisium of some as has been pretended, is the most wretched place in nature and the poorest State in the Union. Virginia is better, but the inhabitants are a disagreeable set of beings. What militates against the young lads who come this way from Yale and Harvard is that many young professional men came at the end of the war and are still coming out from

Great Britain, Ireland and Scotland, and are establishing themselves in business, to whom greater credit and confidence are given than to Yankees; because they suppose that no man can have a tolerable education in America unless it is completed in Europe. Yale is not known. They suppose in these parts that Boston includes all New-England, and I have been asked repeatedly whether New-England was not in Boston. Nothing but the essence of genius can withstand the torrent of bigotry and prejudice that is in action against the New-Englanders. I conceive that they are jealous of their rights and are fearful that the Northern States will be their Law-Givers. Be that as it may, I think the time is approaching.

With best respects to all friends, I am, Dear Sir, your's affectionately,

CHAS. C. WHITE."

The following is from a letter written by another college acquaintance, Barnabas Bidwell (Yale, 1785), from his home in that region in Western Massachusetts which was just recovering from the experience of Shays's Rebellion :

“TYRINGHAM, June 16th, 1787.

* * * Since I came from New Haven, I have traversed the greatest part of this County and a considerable part of Hampshire; partly for the sake of business, but more in order to gratify my curiosity and gain information concerning the political state of People. I find the majority of the populace have been disaffected to Governmental measures. The Gentlemen of learning & the liberal professions, especially the Clergy, are universally for Government. Debtors are generally on the other side; and this class comprehends more than half of the people. Persons guilty of crimes, or who wish to commit crimes; Rhode Island Emigrants and almost all of the denomination of Baptists; men of warm passions & but little reason; men of fickle minds, fond of every new scheme and proud of an enterprising spirit,—such have pretty generally engaged in the Insurrection. They have been joined by many, who have no attachment to any establishment, but were glad of the commotion, as it gave them something to do. They have also drawn in a large number of boys; and also of the

ignorant, uninformed, but well-meaning common people, who hearing such a dreadful outcry against Government, believed there were some intolerable grievances, although they knew not what. Almost all, with whom I have conversed, acknowledge that they took a wrong method to get redress, by resorting to arms and stopping Courts, when the alterations which they desired might be procured by instructing their Representatives or changing them at the ensuing election. Yet they justify themselves, by censuring the consequent treatment of Government. Artful, designing men have had the address to engage the multitude in their service, and at the same time make them believe they were serving themselves. When this delusion was once effected, the people scorned to give out, especially as they believed the majority, and indeed almost the whole, to be on their side. This mistake was natural. For let any company or any nation be divided, one half for the present establishment, and the other half for something new, yet the talk will be almost all for the change; and consequently a majority will appear to be on that side. At present each party endeavour to triumph, the Friends of Government in the total suppression of the rebel force; & the Malcontents in the change of Administration. Yet if the same is firmly pursued, they will be compleatly baffled, and Government acquire new vigour;—which is the wish of your humble servant,

B. BIDWELL.”

The next extract is from the pen of the Rev. Henry Channing (Yale, 1781), a native of Newport, Rhode Island, and the uncle of the Rev. Dr. W. E. Channing of Boston. The convention for framing the Constitution of the United States had risen one week before the date of his letter. He was settled at this time in New London, Connecticut, but was just now spending his honeymoon in Lyme.

“LYME, Sept. 28th, 1787.

* * * A word on Politics. What say you to the result of Convention? Mr. [Pierpont] Edwards, I perceive, is enthusiastic in its favour & sanguine in his expectations of its adoption. He tells me your good friend

Chauncey is as he was. He is representative: I cannot think that he is really the representative of the influential. The representation in general is good & I hope that we shall yet see the reestablishment of government. Rhode Island will reject the proposed constitution, for the D—— hath great wrath, knowing that his time is short. They are a truly wretched people & have no prospect of speedy relief, unless there be a union of the other States. In this case I should hope to see them *governed*. You know that I have always been a Friend to government. The Paper money gentry considered me as greatly reprehensible because when at Newport I publicly prayed for & pitied them. I don't know that they considered themselves political apostates for whom prayer ought not to be made. I pity the minority, their situation is truly unhappy; they keep up their spirits and lash with satire. The Herald you doubtless read. The majority call it the Scourge. It indeed makes them bleed and groan. I expect to visit Newport the next week. I intend to go as far in boldness of speech as will consist with the dignity of the Pulpit & the spirit of the Gosple, which is undaunted as well as meek." * * *

Next is a series of extracts from letters of the Hon. Zephaniah Swift (Yale, 1778), of Windham, Connecticut (afterwards Chief Justice of the State), written during the earlier part of his service as a Member of Congress.

“PHILADELPHIA, Dec^r. 31th, 1793.

* * As to Congress I am hardly ready to give you my sentiments concerning it. I have had such a vast variety of objects to engage my attention, that I have not been able to form any accurate opinion about any thing.

We are accommodated with a very elegant, convenient, and splendid room, but there is much less dignity in our proceedings than I expected. Our Speaker¹ tho' a worthy man has not one Talent for his office. He has no grace, dignity, or propriety in his conduct. He has the German pronunciation and is hardly to be understood when he speaks. He was elected by a cursed Intrigue of the Members from Pennsylvania. The Members do not conduct

¹Hon. Frederick A. Muhlenberg, of Pennsylvania.

with much propriety. They form parties round the fire and talk so loud as to disturb those who wish to attend to business, and the speaker has not firmness enough to keep them to order. It is really true that we lose much of our influence by the undignified mode of our conduct. Congress do not conduct with so much dignity, propriety, and good order as a Connecticut House of Representatives. The new Members from Connecticut are yet too modest to take a part in the debates, but I presume that their modesty will wear off in due time.

The conduct of the President is such as merits the support of Congress and the Citizens of the United States. You may be assured that the Connecticut delegation are firm friends to the present administration, but I find in Philadelphia many wild furious mad democrats, who wish to raise the Devil. They are vexed that Congress close their Galleries during their debates upon the confidential communications from the President respecting the Algerines. They call us the Servants and say they are the Masters, but the Servants have had the pleasure to turn their Masters out of doors sundry times. I have no idea of going from Connecticut where the great body of the People are respectable and well informed to have the mob of Philadelphia call me their masters." * * *

“PHILADELPHIA, March 5th, 1794.

* * * You have probably heard of the Vote of the Senate to open their doors the next session. I am fully of opinion that the doors of the Senate ought not to be opened, and yet in the present situation of affairs it became necessary. Much jealousy and enmity had been excited against that Branch of our Legislature in the Southern States by the secrecy of their deliberations, and some in the Senate who were disposed to do mischief had it in their power to attack particular characters, and their misrepresentations could not be counteracted because the transactions were private. In particular some of the Southern took advantage of this to injure the Eastern Members, and there is a great prejudice among the Southern people against the Senators from the Eastward. It was thought that opening the doors of the Senate would remove this ground of jealousy and enmity and take away the power of misrepresentation—that when

the People in the Southern States had a chance to see what the conduct of the Eastern Senators actually was, that they would find them much more deserving their confidence than their own, and that in effect the tables would be turned against the advocates for the measure—that they would lessen in the public estimation, while the characters of the Gentlemen against whom the blow was aimed would rise in proportion. The abilities of the Eastern Members or rather those who have opposed the measure of opening the doors are much the most brilliant, and I suspect the *Senatorial Democrats* will repent of their rashness & folly.” * * *

“PHILADELPHIA, April 17th, 1794.

* * * In regard to Sequestration [of British debts] it ought to be considered as a part of a System of Measures pregnant with the deepest Mischief. It is an object with the Virginia Members and many others from the Southern States to cut off all commercial connection with Great Britain. They wish at least to adopt measures that shall defeat a Negotiation. * * * While this measure was under consideration the President sent a Nomination to the Senate of Mr. Jay to be Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Great Britain. * * * Mr. Jefferson was never mentioned here as proposed for an Ambassador. Mr. Hamilton was mentioned, but the Southern Democrats made such rout that it was thought best by Hamilton himself to appoint Mr. Jay against whom one would suppose there could be no objection, and yet the Southern Democrats object. I once mentioned to some of them Mr. Ellsworth, but they objected and declared they had no confidence in him. As you know Mr. Ellsworth you may judge what opinion to form of these people. There is no such thing as conciliation with them. They would not have any confidence in an Angel if he would not avow himself of their party. I wish you could be here a short time to acquire a just idea of Virginia politics. You could not help detesting them as ruinous to the country. To detail them would be impossible in a letter. When I see you again I will tell you the whole and you will be convinced that if they should pervade the Union that they would destroy the Government.” * * *

“PHILADELPHIA, Nov. 11th, 1794.

* * * You intimate that some influential characters in the country are disposed to give an aristocratic tone to our Government. I am sorry to hear a gentleman of your information intimate a suspicion so unfounded and groundless. I am satisfied from the fullest enquiry and the best information that there are no gentlemen of any influence in the United States, that wish to have the principles of Monarchy or Aristocracy introduced into our Government. All the leading characters in administration are strictly Republicans, and wish to give no other tone to our Government than what is necessary to preserve it against that spirit of Jacobinism which under the specious name of Democracy would level all distinctions in Society and destroy the principles of genuine liberty and good Government. It is people of this description who have branded the real friends of order and humanity with the odious epithet of Aristocrats, for the purpose of destroying their influence and laying the foundation for the Government of a mob—the most detestable Government that ever God suffered to vex the human race. But the spirit of Jacobinism is visibly on the decline in this Country. The insurrection in Pennsylvania is the happiest event that ever happened to the United States. It has exhibited Democracy in practice, and even Democrats are frightened with the horrid monster. There is an astonishing change of sentiment among the People here, and the suppression of this insurrection will give the Government of the United States a tone, an energy, and dignity, which will defy all the efforts of Anarchy and Jacobinism. There is no danger of our being involved in the war, and the most glorious prospect is opening before the United States.

You mention that you and Mr. Reeve expect to see a millenium in politics and the utter extinction of Royalty in the course of this generation. It is quite as probable that you will see a Millenium in Religion, and the second coming of Christ to live and rule and reign a thousand years in America, as some visionaries have supposed. The progress of things in France by no means indicates the utter extinction of Royalty in that Country, but only that the sceptre will be transferred to a different family. Some

Individual has governed France in the most absolute manner ever since the murder of Louis. Danton & Robespierre were Kings in effect for a time, and Tallien now reigns. Revolutions will continue till some one takes the helm who has an armed force to defend his throne and crush all opposition. This is the course of things, and there is not the remotest prospect of ever establishing a Republican Government in France." * * *

“PHILADELPHIA, Dec^r. 13th, 1794.

* * * I agree with you in the commendation of the speech of Mr. Ames, but can assure you that the speech published falls infinitely short of the speech actually delivered, both as it respects the elegance of stile, the energy of expression, and the wonderful brilliancy of metaphor, for which Ames has the most copious talents of any man I ever heard speak. To this must be added that beautiful, animated and interesting manner for which he is distinguished and which is wholly lost in reading. Indeed it was the most sublime and eloquent harangue which I ever heard, and Ames is the most accomplished orator in the United States. The great Maddison, who has acquired so much undeserved celebrity, spoke the day following. He had full time to collect his ideas, arrange his arguments, and round his periods; but I assure you he is a child in comparison with Ames. A hollow, feeble voice,—an awkward, uninteresting manner,—a correct stile without energy or copiousness,—are his distinguishing traits; tho' correct in expression and solid in judgment, yet he is wholly destitute of vigour of genius, ardour of mind, and brilliancy of imagination. He has no fire, no enthusiasm, no animation; but he has infinite prudence and industry, the greatest apparent candor, he calculates upon everything with the greatest nicety and precision; he has unquestionably the most personal influence of any man in the house of Representatives. I never knew a man that better understood to husband a character and make the most of his talents; and he is the most artificial, studied character on earth." * * *

The following extract from a letter of a townsman of Judge Daggett, William Bristol, Esq. (Yale, 1798), illus-

trates the feeling of good Federalists toward John Adams in the last year of his Presidency :

“NEW HAVEN, June 30th, 1800.

Our President came in town on his Journey to Massachusetts on Saturday, & has not yet gone on. There have been no congratulatory addresses ; no ringing of Bells ; no firing of Cannon ; & I believe very little rejoicing at his *advent*. He went to the Chapel yesterday in the forenoon ; & to resemble his Predecessor in office, *in one particular*, staid at home in the afternoon. Mr. [Pierpont] Edwards is the only Person that, I have yet learned, has visited him. The President tells him that *Mr. Pickering* opposed him in every measure of administration & that it was necessary for himself to give up *his* office or that Mr. Pickering should surrender his. That in his opinion it would be more convenient to the interest of the Public that Mr. P should give up first, &c., &c. All this *may* be true ; but, *credat Judaeus Apella.*” * * *

In 1800 Judge Daggett's classmate and most intimate friend, John Cotton Smith, afterwards Governor of the State, was sent to Congress ; a few extracts from his early letters are here given :

“WASHINGTON, 18, Dec., 1800.

* * * The votes of Kentucky & Tennessee have not arrived. But the Jacobins *shudder at the sure & certain prospect of their being unanimous for Jefferson & Burr*,—in which case probably the election will devolve upon this house. Their civility to us poor federalists becomes every hour more conspicuous. They are sure, they say, we shall prefer Mr. Jefferson ; at any rate they are confident we shall be willing to gratify them in the choice, as they most assuredly would have been thus polite & accommodating to us if Adams & Pinckney had been placed in a similar situation. We tell them the alternative is indeed dreadful, but as we have always been inclined towards an efficient administration, so the man of the two who shall be found to possess the most energy of character, the man most *practical* & least *visionary*, must undoubtedly be preferred. In short the only consolation left us, a horrid one it is true,

consists in boring these fellows; and you may be assured that all we have suffered, all that we can suffer, at the loss of our hopes is not to be compared with their *apparent* distress at the present position of business.

But, seriously, a powerful interest is making for the *parvus homo* [*i. e.* Burr] in the event of an equivote; and strange as it may seem, the thing becomes daily more plausible to our most sober & respectable members. I give no opinion, but I shall be gratified with yours." * * *

“WASHINGTON, 1. Jany., 1801.

* * * I trust you will approve the plan here proposed to worm ourselves out of the vast political embarrassment under which we labor. It seems now the undivided sentiment among federalists in the house & indeed in the surrounding country, to oust Jefferson of the Presidency *at all hazards*. We will support Burr, and if the Jacobins were serious & sincere in offering him to the people, they will, a sufficient number of them at least, join us. Otherwise let them take on themselves the responsibility of an interregnum. The federal part of the house have not yet held a *caucus*, but that we shall come to such a conclusion & invariably adhere to it when formed, I think there is little doubt.” * * *

“WASHINGTON, 13. Jany., 1801.

* * * We are waiting anxiously for the 2nd Wednesday of Feb'y. There is a certain '*fearful looking for*' pictured on the countenances of both parties which can admit of no description. Circumstances favorable to B[urr]'s election multiply daily. This project, at once abhorred and supported by all good federalists, is fast ripening for execution. I received last evening a letter from Judge Reeve¹ on this subject which ought to be printed in letters of gold. His discernment surmounts all prejudice, and his enlightened conception of the policy of the measure has enabled him to subdue his abhorrence of the man. It is playing a deep & hazardous game, but if we ALL STAND OUR HANDS I trust the issue will be such as our country & Heaven itself shall approve.” * * *

¹ Brother-in-law of Burr.

“WASHINGTON, 2. March, 1801.

* * * This city already exhibits a sad spectacle of depravity. I much doubt whether more of those vices which go equally to the destruction of all private & social happiness have been practiced in any capital town on the continent the last three months than in this same dismal metropolis. Gambling in all its forms and debauchery of every species have prevailed to a degree that must alarm & afflict every reflecting mind. The want of elegant amusements has been attempted to be supplied by the indulgence of the most gross & beastly appetites. ‘If these things are done in the green tree what will be done in the dry?’ * * * A project has been on foot to remove back to Philadelphia; it is now abandoned. In truth this place is good enough for the men shortly to be in power, & the farther they are separated from our country, the better our chance to preserve entire the principles & habits of the only uncorrupted portion of the nation.

You no doubt have expected that in the course of this long, and I fear tedious letter, something should be said of the new executive, the new chief justice, &c., &c. A volume would be required to pourtray the public sins & private follies of the former. There are more ridiculous traits in his character than you would believe were I to attempt the delineation of them. The latter deserves all that has been said of his talents, but he is equally destitute of firmness & the least dignity of manners.” * * *

“WASHINGTON, 7. Decr., 1801,

A quorum of the two houses have assembled. * * * A joint committee are now waiting on the President of U. S. to inform him of the readiness of the legislature to receive his communications. Report says NO SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED, but that a *written message* will be sent us tomorrow. The truth of this rumour will probably be ascertained by the return of the committee.

The committee have this moment returned & their report confirms the above statement. Every one will make his own comment on this unprecedented procedure. However I may admire the pusillanimous caution of the measure, I do not hesitate to pronounce it a most outrageous indignity offered to the National legislature.

Whenever the *written thing* shall make its appearance it shall be forwarded to you." * * *

The closing extract of this series is from a letter of the same correspondent, written during the discussions in the House on the Judiciary Bill :

“WASHINGTON, 20. Feby., 1802.

* * * I am doubtful whether the discussion of this subject will close even with the next week ; its magnitude and importance seem to increase as its fatal issue approaches. Our side of the house have hitherto appeared to infinite advantage,—but there is no possibility of preventing the passage of the bill. No human means can avert the deadly blow from the victim. The constitution must be immolated. This measure alone might not absolutely destroy the government, but it is only the precursor of other & more fatal attacks. Every day discloses facts which leave no room for conjecture on this point. What then is to be done?—Shall we, who have made every possible exertion to stop the progress of vandalism, *remain here* to witness its triumphs? This is a solemn question, and requires much deliberation.” * * *

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