

**April 30<sup>th</sup> 1807. - Written June 30.**

In the course of this month occurred an unfortunate affair which terminated my connection with Harvard University. It is after the lapse <sup>^</sup>of three months, on my return from a journey to N[ew] Jersey, that I attempt recording the circumstances which led to that event. I have had time for reflection, & leisure calmly to review the past. I write what I now think. I am forming a memorial which when years shall have rolled over my head, may recall a faithful & just idea of my youthful transactions. –

Complaints had frequently been made by the students of Harvard University to the Corporation, of the badness of the food, which was offered them in Commons. Those complaints had received some attention. Partial reforms had frequently been made, but the root of all evil which consisted in the characters of those employed to execute the orders of the Corporation, was still neglected. At length, grown impatient, the students resolved to make one last attempt - to address their superiors, as suppliants, but with a tone of moderate firmness. The petition was written & presented; its style was becoming, but from the very nature of the thing it could not convey an impression of immediate interference being necessary. Grievances like ours, however they may be felt, appear like nothing & excite no sympathy on paper. I can not say that an immediate attention was urged.

After a delay of ten days, the students again assembled. They had received no answer to their request - they perceived no effect from it. They enquired of their committee the result of their petition. The committee answered that “*they had been daily to the President for an answer, but he would not see them - that they despaired of obtaining admittance*”. At this meeting the senior class, of which I was myself a member, attended. In the former proceedings they had taken no farther part, than to give their consent. By invitation they now joined the deliberation. - After hearing the report of the committee, it was considered what was to be done in this extremity. It was concluded that we would retire from <sup>^</sup>the eating hall at noon, immediately after the blessing, in order of classes; that we would proceed to the kitchen & there destroy all the obnoxious provisions. For five minutes all were busy in arming themselves for the occasion, but meanwhile reflection was at work & soon convinced a majority of the rashness of their resolution. A second meeting was held; the latter part of the first resolution was recalled, & it was determined to leave the hall as before agreed, but orderly & decently, without noise or insult, & to seek our dinners elsewhere. But if no answer was received to our petition on the next day we were again to enter commons & if the senior class disapproved of the provision made, on their motion all were to retire as before, & the destruction, but just now deferred, was to be carried into effect.” –

At noon, soon as the blessing was pronounced, all retired in order & silence. At evening they did not return. The next morning a vote of the immediate government was read from the desk to this effect “that the students having absented themselves from noon & evening commons, it appeared unnecessary any longer to provide that kind of accommodation, and the students are hereby permitted to board out at proper houses till further orders, & on the forenoon of this day to hold meetings by classes for the purpose of chusing a committee, not exceeding three from each class, to prepare a remonstrance to the corporation, to be presented to them at a meeting in Cambridge on Friday of ~~the same~~ <sup>^</sup>this week, (this was Tuesday) & also to answer such questions as that Hon[orable] body ~~might~~ <sup>^</sup>may chuse to ask.” - The meetings were held -

the committees were chosen - A statement was prepared - I was myself on the committee from the senior class. - The new statement was only an improvement on the old - some things were added - some were altered - it was particularly recommended to renew entirely the servants in the kitchen - they were represented as filthy & careless in the extreme. -

On Friday the statement was presented. The Corporation after considering it for some time by themselves, called before them the whole joint committee. They were questioned & in their answers stated several facts, which sufficiently proved the existence of great abuses in the kitchen. Thus far they were treated with great politeness & affability.

This business over, their state was immediately changed to that of arraigned culprits. The Hon[orable] Theo[dore] Parsons addressed <sup>^</sup>them with much severity on the subject of their late conduct. He termed it "indecent & unmanly, evincing a disposition to break through all restraints of law & authority, a contempt of all salutary regulations, which if not checked would inevitably make Harvard the nurse of demagogues & disorganizers. The occasion, he concluded, demanded an example of great severity." Such language was revolting to our hearts - we felt an indignation, mingled with a respect, which sobered & chastened its expression - we retired in silence - amazed & confounded at the light in which our conduct was viewed. - We gave to our fellow students a faithful account of what had passed.

We waited anxiously to know the result of the deliberation - the next morning it was declared that "whereas the greater part of the students have behaved in a disorderly & indecent manner, it is hereby ordered that all who do not on or before the seventh day from the reading of this, subscribe to the following certificate, shall dissolve their connection with this university, & be sent to their parents for future government, not being worthy members of this institution. - The certificate or concession (for "what's in a name") was this verbatim. "*We the subscribers, who went out of the hall at dinner on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> of March, do hereby declare that our conduct in so doing contrary to the laws for the preservation of order & decorum, do hereby declare that our conduct in so doing was improper, that we regret it, & that we will never again offend in like manner*".

A meeting of the students was held shortly after, in which it was determined that a committee then & there appointed, should draw up a resolution, by which all who subscribed <sup>^</sup>to it would be bound never to subscribe to the required concession. The resolution was drawn up <sup>1\*</sup> & immediately signed by the students, with very few exceptions. And at the same time another, by which most of those who happened not to be involved ~~we~~ bound themselves to support their fellows & to share their fate. - Thus things remained thro' the ensuing week.

Mean while on the supposition that all would retire a "*statement of facts*", written ~~by~~ <sup>^</sup>after earnest solicitation by W[illia]m White of Watertown, was published with the names of most of the students attached to it. But it was founded on a very mistaken idea. It was in the style of an appeal of the whole body of students, but alas! the number of those who bound themselves solemnly by every thing dear to them, to support one another, is now reduced to a pitiful dozen. - Great exertions were made by the gentlemen of Boston & the vicinity, who

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<sup>1</sup> \* This resolution was prepared by myself.

were parents or guardians of students, to persuade the whole body to return to their allegiance. Their persuasions could not avail. Many of them, then resorted to force & before Saturday night at 9 o'clock, nearly 80 names were subscribed to the certificate. Those who had been most noisy & confident, were the most ready to submit. On Monday we were informed that farther time was allowed us to subscribe, on presenting a humble petition. Numbers availed themselves of this opportunity, & to conclude on the Thursday following about 50 only received a dismissal. Of that number I was one. –

Such is a faithful account of all the circumstances, as they relate to all. - I will first state my opinion for my own remembrance, of the merits of the general cause. I will then examine my individual conduct. - For what was concession demanded? For the violation of a law. When a man has done wrong, it can not be a punishment to acknowledge that wrong. But is the violation of a law in no circumstances proper? Good sense will answer, all laws suppose exemptions arising from certain circumstances. It may sometimes be necessary to presume a permission, in cases thought to be so plainly understood, that the legislator has made no express provision for them. The students of Harvard then finding that no other method was left to obtain redress, might reasonably presume that their retiring from the hall would pass uncensured. I say in these circumstances they might thus have presumed. But were these the real circumstances of the case? In my private opinion they were not. The students had not waited long enough for an answer to their petition to warrant the step they took. I have been assured by Gentlemen of undoubted honor & veracity, that matters were in train for an enquiry & thorough reform. How <sup>^ far</sup> the present non-existence of such a reform, may be an argument against its ever having been intended, is a subject for consideration. - Nor in my opinion were the students actuated solely by a desire to convince of the justice of their complaints. Resentment at the neglect with which, from the misinformation of the committee, we supposed ourselves to have been treated, had with me & I believe with every one, a very considerable share of influence.

It was afterward discovered that the committee had been but three times, instead of twenty, to the President, & then at seasons when they could not properly expect him to attend them. When this was avowed, I was indeed thunderstruck - had I then viewed it in the light I now do & with some other concurrent circumstances I never should have joined in farther opposition. - But does this take away all excuse from the students? May they not say, "*on entering the University, we formed a mutual contract with its governors. They were also under obligation to furnish us with wholesome & decent food. They had broken the engagement, we of course, were not held to it.*"? But how far will this reasoning extend? They may go on, & declare themselves in right to violate every law in the code. Shall every little negligence, ~~some~~ <sup>^ every</sup> little evil unavoidably crept into the management of college affairs, upset the whole constitution & dissolve the tie between master & student? Certainly not. If an abuse existed, ~~they~~ <sup>^ authority</sup> were <sup>^ was</sup> ready & willing to correct it, as the students would have found by their committee had ~~they~~ <sup>^ it</sup> behaved properly. -

Beside, what motive could there be for entering commons & then again leaving them, which, say what we will, was an absolute insult? Why not rather absent ourselves altogether? Every good effect would have been the same. This I believe not one of us could satisfactorily answer.- If then the students were in the wrong - if they had acted rashly & improperly, tho' from misconceptions, why should they refuse to subscribe to an acknowledgement of that

wrong? I know the motives & causes, which prevented myself from so doing; they are probably the same which long withheld ~~some~~ many <sup>^ from yielding</sup> & induced others <sup>^ a few</sup> to persevere. - The address from Judge Parsons of which I was myself an auditor, was severe to a degree which I thought far beyond our deserts, even had we been guilty of a considerable crime. The terms, which he applied to our conduct, I knew as to myself & I believed as to others, were wide from just. The dispositions, the principles, he ascribed to us, I could not on the strictest scrutiny find to have <sup>^had</sup> any share in regulating my conduct. Conscious that my views, & <sup>^ persuaded that</sup> those of my companions were greatly misconceived, in the idea of our own injury, I forgot to consider whether we ourselves had not injured. Certain that we were not <sup>^ as</sup> guilty as our governors had represented us, this conclusion insensibly became that of our own entire innocence. Indignation succeeded - flame added power to flame - some expressions contained in the vote of the Corporation, completed the general ardor - all were resolved not to humiliate themselves - all swore to support one another -

With many the warmth continued - for myself, I was early convinced of the impropriety of our measures, I twice attempted to impress some leading characters with the same idea, & thus to bring about a general reconciliation, but it was in vain, tho' some, who were then most obstinate, have since yielded without doing me the favor to ask my company. Resolved that tho' I had rashly joined an improper combination, I would submit to the full effect of my mistake, nor desert one who could not like myself be convinced of his error, I continued to act contrary to my real sentiments, nor did any but those leading characters, I have before mentioned, know my true opinion. Thus the affair was carried thro' & I, with a few, very few companions, have seceded from the University.

I am not a disorganizer - I have obeyed authority, though of the two modes of obedience, which they proposed, I have chosen that I least wished. I have chosen it, not because I ~~did not~~ believed it <sup>^ im</sup>proper to concede, but because I had rashly engaged, when I did believe so, to take the opposite alternative, & to this engagement I was held till all my copartners should relinquish their claim. I could <sup>^ not</sup> endure the idea that they should suffer from my rashness. I was indeed but one of their number & one with very little influence, but even that accession might have <sup>^ had</sup> a share in encouraging them to their past actions. Should I desert them? Should I leave them to sustain the effects of my imprudence? Surely I could not. -

For my rash conduct I have some excuses. Had I not been deceived by the committee, I never should have left the hall - had I not afterward been greatly deceived, as I believe many others were, as to the nature of the concession, I might perhaps never have bound myself not to subscribe it - for that concession I did not hear read from the desk - indisposition prevented my attendance. - In that consisted my rashness - in binding myself not to subscribe a concession, which I had not myself examined. I then however thought all concession to be improper. - Another piece of folly was forming an engagement with those, who, I knew, had not the direction of their own conduct. - My imprudence is sufficiently punished, it is but just it should be so; And it is my firm resolve, never to return to my station in Cambridge, till all my associates shall do the same, or shall shew that they have separate reasons, for persisting in their first determination.

As for literature, anxiety & tumult have driven it entirely from my thoughts during the whole month of April.

## **May.**

The first part of May, I passed at home. I had been lately so much engaged, & my mind so disturbed & perplexed, that relaxation seemed necessary. The season too invited it. I studied however a part of the 6<sup>th</sup> book of Euclid, & engaged in some light reading not worth recording.