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A Legacy of Inaction

Robert Gordon Menna

Great Falls, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts, The College of William and Mary, 2007

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

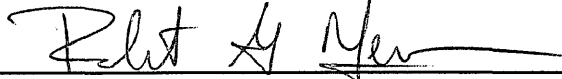
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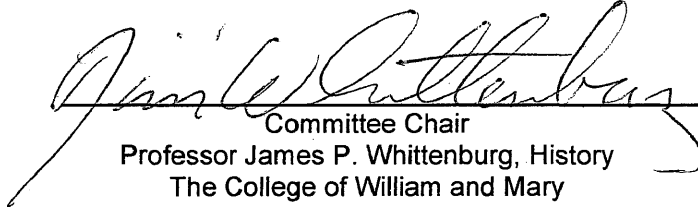
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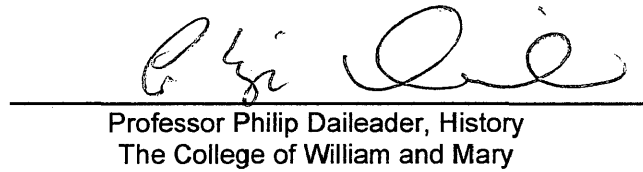


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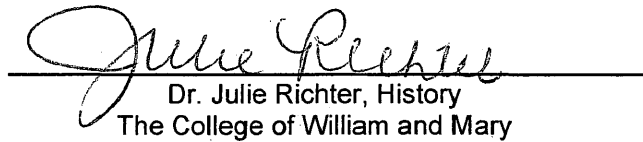
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ABSTRACT PAGE

The histories of the College of William and Mary laud its founder, the Rev. James Blair, its noteworthy students, its age and its tradition. Such histories filter down into more everyday understandings of institutional pedigree, buoyed by mentions of Thomas Jefferson, and reminders of its status as second-oldest college in the nation. The stories underneath this worthy but recurring narrative are the true source of the success, the foundation on which the College stands. While the school survived the challenges of weak leaders, religious change, political dissension and two very local wars, historians should never allow evidence of its persistence to casually impute any inevitability to it. This study seeks to cast light on the tenure of a man ill-suited to his position, at just the time the institution in his charge encountered hierarchical turmoil amidst the early rumblings of larger colonial commotions. Thomas Dawson served as the College's fourth president, and held the job for only five years, but his meek nature, alleged alcoholism, and unruly students and faculty shaped his story from institutional blandness to a colorful drama, perhaps even a comic tragedy.

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Ben Abel deserves great respect and gratitude for his wise edits and suggestions, without which this work would have remained jumbled. His was a voice of reason in a year of absurdity. The support of my closest friends Matt Connell, Than Htike Maung, Eric Rosner, Dan McGrady, and Mary MacKenzie Grier kept my head up throughout my work in Williamsburg. To my sister Caroline and my brother Greg, I must always remain indebted for keeping their older brother in check. Michelle Gannon has given me more than I deserve, her love is my prized possession.

I owe an insurmountable debt to my parents, Robert and Merridy, for devoting their existence to their children. I understand now the only way to repay them is to follow their example, the same set for them by their parents, Robert and Dorothy Gordon, and Rudolph and Veronica Menna. During this paper's long hibernation, I lost a Grandfather who would have been proud to see this complete.

A Legacy of Inaction

While college histories laud the key leaders, one ought not overlook the confluence of a failure in leadership and an emergence of a strong board of visitors, all at a time of disorder. By returning to much detail that has been either missed, strained, or underappreciated from institutional histories and attempting to employ some of the disinterestedness of the general histories, I look to examine the case of William and Mary in particular, and seek to understand how the timing of the presidential tenure of Thomas Dawson, a man inherently juxtaposed to his predecessors, related to the growing administrative and political tensions of the day.

I. “A Tradition of Excellence”

The College of William and Mary never had the opportunity to stay out of politics. The royally chartered institution played an active part in the political operations of Britain’s largest colony from its founding. Virginia’s first institution of higher learning was hardly exceptional in this respect; indeed, J. David Hoeveler calls the colonial colleges “political to the core.”¹ After Jamestown’s statehouse burned for the fourth time in October of 1698, the General Assembly sought to relocate the capitol. In his characteristically dramatic and enterprising fashion, College founder Rev. James Blair campaigned successfully in tandem with Virginia’s governor, Francis Nicholson, to convince the Assembly that the farther inland Middle Plantation, where the new College building stood, would serve as the best site for a new capitol. At a May Day celebration, five students of the College’s

¹ Hoeveler, J. David. *Creating the American Mind* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), ix-x.

budding grammar school delivered orations supporting Williamsburg so effective that they revealed at the least heavy coaching, perhaps even the pens of Blair and Nicholson.²

Blair devoted fifty years of his life to the management of the College he founded in 1693. As a fierce administrator, the Scottish-born clergyman clashed with Virginia's governors and won. In his role as Anglican commissary in a colony known for its rough characters, Blair was thorough and strict. One may gain a more meaningful impression of his pointed demeanor through his attitude towards evaluating the inebriation of an erring minister:

“Let the signs of Drunkenness be proved such as sitting an hour or longer in the Company where they were a drinking strong drink...; striking, challenging, threatening to fight, or laying aside any of his Garments for that purpose; staggering, reeling, vomiting, incoherent, impertinent, obscene, or rude talking. Let the proof of these signs proceed so far till the Judges conclude that the minister's behaviour at such a time was scandalous, indecent, and unbecoming the Gravity of a minister.”³

Such specificity helped keep order amongst ministers where the church's infrastructure was still very much controlled from London. As a forceful leader, Blair never left room for potential competition for control of his institution.

When fire destroyed the College building in October of 1705, William and Mary was a grammar school with no money, no faculty and nowhere to function.

2 Morpurgo, J.E. *Their Majesties' Royall Colledge, William and Mary in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Hennage Creative Printers, 1976), 46-47.

3 Rouse, Parke. *James Blair of Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 146

Eminent colonial historian Thad Tate quotes Thomas Hearne, a contemporary “Oxford don,” who commented that, if not for the fire, Blair’s school “would in some time have grown very famous,”⁴ emphasizing the disappointing dimness of the future of William and Mary, the ashes of which could then be politely flattered. For Tate, the College’s prospects “were never more ominous than at the end of 1705.”⁵ But the College to which Tate refers was mostly an unrealized vision; there had yet to appear much that could have been doomed. One historian of colonial colleges finds that it took at least until “about 1712” for the school to make any progress towards providing higher education, when some “college level instruction finally began.”⁶ It appears however, at least according to Thad Tate, that even this date refers merely to the *failed* effort to install a French professor of natural philosophy and mathematics.⁷ Blair completed a new College building by 1721 and oversaw the construction of the Brafferton building, for the education of local Indians, by 1723. In 1729, Blair had finally secured a full faculty of six, thereby fulfilling the terms of the transfer of the charter to the president and masters. This is the moment at which one can first tally real progress. It is to this juncture that British historian and author of the bicentennial-themed history of the College J.E. Morpurgo refers as he writes,

4 Tate, Thad W. in Godson, Susan H., Ludwell H. Johnson, Richard B. Sherman, Thad W. Tate, and

Helen C. Walker. *The College of William and Mary: A History*. Vol. I (Williamsburg, VA: King and Queen Press, 1993), 47

5 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 49

6 Cohen, Sheldon S. *A History of Colonial Education* (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), 136.

7 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 53

It seemed that the College was at last close to maturity. A completed Faculty, a full set of credentials (Charter, Statutes, and Transfer), for the moment the virtually unqualified support of the Colony's legislators, and some improvement in student enrollment....Success of all kinds was to prove short lived....The Faculty, for example, started to disintegrate almost before it had been collected.... The Statutes ... fell into desuetude before they had been tried.... The carefully-wrought Transfer instrument was no sooner handed over than it was found to be rich in ambiguities.⁸

With this hardly ringing endorsement of the College's stability, it is difficult to reconcile Morpurgo's subsequent statement summarizing Blair's contribution to the institution, saying that he left it "if not secure, then at least permanently woven into the fabric of Virginian society."⁹ The tenure of James Blair ended in 1743. Certainly, it was through his largely single-handed, but often self-interested work that the institution had lasted through the reign of two monarchs following its namesakes, and many other challenges, but the College had yet to award a degree or send a clergyman to London for ordination. The fire of 1705 alone had shown the College to be anything but permanent. Even Tate concedes that through Blair's personal ambitions and totally independent control of William and Mary, the exceptionally driven leader had left the College, at least administratively, "a fragile institution."¹⁰

The histories of the College take detailed but generally favorable views of its development, often revealing a somewhat nostalgic pursuit to locate the institution's origins of greatness. Indeed, the general attitude prevalent on campus today may be summarized by the closing portion of a recent press release: "William and Mary is

8 Morpurgo, *Their Majesties' Royall Colledge*, 88-90

9 Ibid., 108

10 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 80

proud of its role as the alma mater of generations of American patriots, leaders and public servants. Now in its fourth century, it continues this tradition of excellence.”¹¹

While this sentiment is understandable and does not discredit the school’s histories, such an approach can lead one to some of the flawed impressions discussed above, that doom loomed closest to the College before it was functioning as anything more than a small grammar school with ambitions, or more importantly, that William and Mary was somehow permanent, if only because one can still observe it thriving today. General histories of colonial colleges take an expectedly less personal view of William and Mary, along with the other institutions to which they devote a few paragraphs, or perhaps a chapter. But this general perspective often leads historians to simply take note of a “record of slow progress through the middle of the eighteenth century,”¹² or the fact that historically prominent men such as Thomas Jefferson and Peyton Randolph, among other political and legal thinkers, gained formative education there. Such observations are important, and contribute to the discussion of colonial American political progress, but they also overshadow other pieces of history’s colorful puzzle. Such color only comes into focus here and there, in short references to the inadequacies of card-playing professors, to a professor “too given to the bottle,” parting ways with the College, or to students barricading

11 College of William and Mary Press Release, “U.S. News: College remains nation’s best small public university,” Aug 17, 2007

12 Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*. 95

themselves within the College building and threatening, and by some accounts carrying through with their threat, to shoot at a college president.¹³

An increase in such items discordant with a neatly packaged summary of a college's developmental progress occurred in the early half of the eighteenth century, and picked up steadily approaching the 1760s. Writing on Yale, Hoeveler finds that, "From 1756 on, student rebelliousness rattled the college. One could recite a dreary chronicle here; indeed the record would repeat throughout the colonial colleges and afterwards."¹⁴ Is attributing this turbulence to "revolutionary fervor," or swirling religious tensions an adequate explanation?¹⁵ To conclude as much would be to ignore history's individual players. Before getting to William and Mary's leadership, the pursuit requires a survey of the campuses of a few of its fellow colonial colleges, through the eyes of the historians who have illuminated some key trends.

II. "In No Sense Popular Institutions"

Kathryn M. Moore found in her brief study on Harvard that dramatically increased enrollment led to more examples of disorder at the Massachusetts college, including a rising number of "parties and pranks," and other group activities, "referred to at the time as routs or riots."¹⁶ Additionally, Moore noted that student

13 Cohen, Sheldon S. *A History of Colonial Education*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1974. p. 139. Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 96.

14 Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 73

15 Ibid, 74

16 Moore, Kathryn M. "Freedom and Constraint in Eighteenth Century Harvard." *Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 17, No. 6, (November/ December 1976) [reprinted in Goodchild, Lester

affluence was also part of the root of the problem of increased drinking and various related offenses, and that the misbehavior was more characteristic of a general mischief than of any potentially anti-authority ideology.¹⁷ Moore concludes that all of this contributed to the rise of a student “sub-culture,” complete with cliques, that had tremendous influence on the life of the campus community.¹⁸

The affluence of colonial college students fits centrally within the framework of historian Frederick Rudolph, who found that, “The colleges were in no sense popular institutions.”¹⁹ Indeed, it was largely the sons of aristocratic families who attended college. Moore quotes the great Samuel Eliot Morison, who found in his own history of Harvard that in the second decade of the eighteenth century, these aristocratic students pursued a goal more social than intellectual upon their arrival at college: “The new crop of young men came to be gentlemen, not to study.”²⁰ The socializing and sophisticating aspect of attaining an education would come to supplant the original track towards the ministry.

John R. Thelin frankly states that “colonial college life was characterized by perpetual tensions between students and faculty. Despite the glorification of the ‘collegiate way’ as a haven for youth and a harmonious arrangement for learning, it

F. and Wechsler, Harold S. eds. *ASHE Reader on the History of Higher Education*, Ginn Press, Needham Heights, MA, 1989. p. 72-73]

17 Moore, “Freedom and Constraint in Eighteenth Century Harvard.” 77

18 Moore, “Freedom and Constraint in Eighteenth Century Harvard.” 78

19 Rudolph, Frederick. *The American College and University: A History*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY, 1962. p. 18

20 Moore, “Freedom and Constraint in Eighteenth Century Harvard.” 72

also was a recipe for conflict characterized by student riots and revolts.”²¹ He goes on to attribute such events to “what we would call ‘consumer complaints’ about matters ranging from bad food in the dining commons to restrictions on student activities and autonomy.”²² The footnote he attaches to these statements cites two sources, both of which deal only with Harvard.

The first source Thelin cites is Kathryn Moore’s 1976 Harvard case study previously cited here. The second is Sheldon S. Cohen’s 1974 essay on two student “riot” activities: the Bad Butter rebellion, and the Turkish Tyranny.²³ The first of these events occurred in 1766. When student protests to the repeated servings of rancid butter at breakfast in the commons were ignored, they organized to voice their discontent. The second came a few years later. Health problems had weakened Harvard’s President “Guts” Holyoke, and the less respected tutors encountered trouble keeping the students in order. In attempting to do so, the tutors misguidedly applied some new academic restrictions, which students met with uproarious objection. Interestingly, both historians refer to the tumultuous campus demonstrations beginning in the 1960’s as points of reference for their historical inquiry. While they take care to avoid “rank present-ism,” it appears that one would

21 Thelin, John R. *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. p. 21

22 Ibid, 21

23 Cohen, Sheldon S. “The Turkish Tyranny,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Dec., 1974), pp. 564-583

need more than a few examples of tension, at more than just one of the nine colonial institutions in order to support such a strong position as Thelin's.²⁴

Sheldon Cohen points to the diary of a freshman at Yale for an example of a "Riot" in 1756: "Many of the Students of the College gathered together in the evening, and rung the Bell, and fired Crackers, Run the Yard, and hollowed & Screamed in a terrible manner."²⁵ The young student names some of the offenders who were apprehended and the punishments they received: two suspensions, a rustication, and many boxings.²⁶

Another source of turmoil within the college environment was the practice of religion. Yale president and hardline Puritan Thomas Clap tried to counter the liberal fervor of the Great Awakening with a resolution barring students from attending revivalist preachers, and later with a test of orthodoxy for college staff in 1753.²⁷ Indeed, according to Frederick Rudolph,

The effect of the Great Awakening clearly was to shatter the pattern of state-church colleges which had developed in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia.... By the end of the colonial period diversity and toleration had become values of such

24 Moore, "Freedom and Constraint in Eighteenth Century Harvard." 71

25 Cohen, *A History of Colonial Education*, 100

26 Rustications were typically temporary banishments into the countryside. Short of expulsion, this ceremonial removal from campus sometimes cost the student the term. The Oxford English Dictionary locates the first use of the word, in reference to punishment at a university, at Harvard in 1734.

27 Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 73

importance that colleges could be founded that claimed only incidental interest in religion or only a loosely acknowledged denominational connection.²⁸

The sentiments of religious change that swept through the souls of the affected colonists were yet another set of powerful forces that occasionally pushed students and faculty alike to action, and in turn, caused much turmoil that served as the beginnings of the disentanglement of clergy from college leadership. Indeed the New Light movement created quite a stir and occasioned much letter writing by Virginia's Anglican Commissaries, but conflicts more specific within the Anglican community drove most of the chaos discussed here.

III. “ No Boy Shall be Permitted to Saunter Away His Time”

What does one make of this tension on campuses during the mid-eighteenth century? From the quotations above, Thelin and Hoeweler seem to agree that such turmoil was indeed prevalent. Once one ventures further to attribute a cause to this friction, a host of potential choices present themselves. Returning our gaze to Williamsburg with these memories in mind, it is possible to see many similarities in the actions of the students and faculty at William and Mary.

The 1743 succession of the Rev. William Dawson as President of the College and Anglican Commissary was unsurprising, as James Blair had favored him for the dual role. His willingness to put up with marriages of faculty, against the regulations set forth in the charter, was part of his “mild” character. In a tenure later known as, “the halcyon days of peace” Dawson ably performed his duties as leader of the

28 Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History*, 16

College.²⁹ It certainly helped that Governor Gooch had a favorable opinion of Dawson and “supported every move made by the President.”³⁰ The governor’s support certainly helped what he referred to as, “that Seminary of Learning, and Ornament to Virginia,” as the General Assembly approved for the College a tobacco duty in 1745, as well as a bevy of taxes on hides in 1748.³¹ Morpurgo notes importantly that these duties were largely unenforced and thus fattened the College purse little.

According to Morpurgo, it was the arrival of Virginia’s next Lieutenant Governor, Robert Dinwiddie, on November 20, 1751, which marked the beginning of the friction between the clerical faculty and the aristocratic Board of Visitors. Dinwiddie had come with instructions in hand “to implement Halifax’s policy of closer control over Virginian affairs.”³² Such an attitude would elicit nothing but resistance on the part of the Virginian upper class; indeed, from the pen of one of those aristocrats, Richard Bland, the Governor was “destined to be unpopular from his first act as Governor to the last.”³³ But the dynamics of authority within the

29 The reference comes from the words of Dudley Digges, a former student, as well as rector and Visitor of the College, in his letter to the Bishop of London, July 15, 1767. Referenced by both Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 110, and Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 82.

30 Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 110

31 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 84 and Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 111

32 Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 116

33 Ford, Worthington C. , ed. Bland, Richard. “A Fragment on the Pistole Fee, claimed by the Governor of Virginia, 1753.” Historical Printing Club, Brooklyn, NY, 1891. p. 6

College itself turned out to be just as crucial to its stability. Regarding Blair's leadership as the standard by which one measures subsequent Presidents, the two who followed William Dawson differed mightily. Additionally, the faculty had become a "larger, more coherent group, able to defy the president and outvote him in the meetings of the faculty and masters that had now become a more regular feature of institutional life."³⁴ This transformation had come about through Blair's effort to fill the six faculty posts required in the terms of the charter. Instead of immediately strengthening the institution, however, as Thad Tate aptly summarizes, it had weakened the presidency, and thus, had

effectively destroyed the ability of Blair's successors to bridge the tension between the Visitors and faculty, a tension built into the charter and statutes and exacerbated by the differing ambitions for the College by the two groups.... The resultant conflict was bitter, often petty, and unyielding on either side, but underneath it lay issues of substance regarding the character and purpose of William and Mary.³⁵

When friction between the clerical faculty and the secular, aristocratic government began to escalate, presidents either unwilling or unable to craft unity among the members of their side created a noticeable void, which only served to exacerbate College tensions.

Governor Dinwiddie earned the scorn of Burgess Richard Bland through his enactment of the Pistole Fee. By attaching a small fee for his royal stamp on all new

³⁴ Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*. I: 85

³⁵ Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*. I, 86

land patents, he attempted to ensure some profit for the Crown.³⁶ In doing so, he added another space to the widening rift between the Governor's Palace and the Assembly. Bland's work, entitled, "A Fragment on the Pistole Fee, claimed by the Governor of Virginia, 1753," rejected the Governor's justification of the fee, namely that other colonial governors had one, and stated frankly that "there is no Law to support this demand."³⁷ The Pistole Fee's political fallout would pale in comparison to the effect of the controversy over the next disputed financial legislation.

Immediately upon the death of William Dawson, a competition arose between Dawson's younger brother, the Reverend Thomas, and William's brother in law, Reverend William Stith. Both men had studied at William and Mary and then at Oxford, and both held positions on the faculty. John Blair, nephew of the founder, wrote the Bishop of London endorsing the younger Dawson, contrasting his "sweet engaging temper" with Stith's "overbearing, satirical & Domineering Temper."³⁸ This key difference between the men would ironically result in short term success for the latter, and unpleasant failure for the former. Governor Dinwiddie also backed Dawson as a function of his disapproval of Stith, who had publicly opposed the Pistole Fee. The Governor also pleaded the case for Dawson's appointment as Anglican Commissary, as he was not only qualified, but had taken on the burden of providing for both his late brother's children, as well as his sister and her children.

Dawson himself wrote Bishop Sherlock and acknowledged his candidacy for the

³⁶ Ibid. As Tate explains, the pistole was "a Spanish coin in wide circulation in the British colonies."

³⁷ Ford, *Wothington C.*, p. 35-37

³⁸ Morpurgo, *Their Majesties' Royall Colledge*, 117

office of Commissary, writing, “if Your Lordship thinks proper to honour me with your Commission, I shall exert my sincere & constant Endeavor faithfully & conscientiously to discharge that important Trust,” and signed the letter, “Your Lordship’s most dutiful, and most obedient servant.”³⁹ While the younger Dawson did obtain the appointment as head of the Anglican church in Virginia, his candidacy for the College office turned out to be premature. The vote ended so closely however, that a recount found a tie which the Rector Dudley Digges broke, casting the deciding vote in favor of Stith.

The rancor continued with William Stith “inflaming opposition to Diwiddie” from his post as chaplain to House of Burgesses.⁴⁰ While Stith’s and Dawson’s educations had been similar, their places of birth were not. That Stith was a native Virginian is a significant point. He may well have embodied a turning point of sorts, as a clergyman of the established church who declined to side with the authority of the royal governor. Could this have been due to some kind of preference for his native colony? He certainly held it in high esteem, as he had painstakingly researched its history for his 1747 work, *The History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia: being an Essay towards a General History of this Colony*.⁴¹ Hoeverler picks up crucial details of Stith’s religious thinking, which further help to fill in the understanding of religious forces as part of the interplay of colonial intellectual culture that the College histories somewhat understate. Stith delivered an

39 Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, July 30, 1752. Fulham Papers, Volume XIII, p. 83

40 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*. I: 88

41 Wright, Louis B., *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (May, 1947), pp. 308

address entitled “The Nature and Extent of Christ’s Redemption” to the Virginia Assembly in which he “upheld the moral life as the near sufficient grounds of salvation,” and thus situated William and Mary “emphatically on the side of rational Christianity.”⁴² Stith’s faculty passed a resolution in January of 1754 appointing someone to “hear such boys as shall be recommended by their parents or guardians, a chapter in the Bible every school-day, at 12 o’clock,” providing an example of Stith’s religious focus on a day to day basis as well.⁴³ This particular attitude of prioritizing outward piety through moral acts must therefore contribute to Stith’s subsequent efforts to address, quite explicitly, assorted examples of student misbehavior.

Also influencing Stith’s apparent belief in the need for a disciplinary reform were the recent increases in the number of scholars studying at the College. As Kathryn Moore found at Harvard in the aforementioned study, the period of dramatically increased enrollment coincided with proportionate increases in misdemeanors. At William and Mary, 1754 stands out as the class in which there were thirty-five students. This number equaled twice that of the previous year and the most until 1798.⁴⁴ Stith was not only quite conscious of the significance of the growing size of the student body, he was proud: “The College is at present in a very peaceable & thriving Way, & now has more Scholars in it, than it has ever had from

42 Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 93-95

43 Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College, *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Papers*, Vol. 2, No. 1. (Jul., 1893), pp. 57

44. Gary, George W. “Catalogue of Alumni” from *The History of the College of William and Mary from its Foundation, 1660 to 1874*. J.W Randolph & English, Richmond, VA, pp. 83-101

it first Foundation, with a fair Prospect of its still farther increasing.”⁴⁵ As J.E.

Morpurgo’s student tally exceeds one hundred, he appears to be including the students studying at the Grammar school, as the number then studying at the college level hardly surpasses 70, even while including the seven Indians ‘studying’ at the Brafferton, via the bequest of Robert Boyle.⁴⁶

Amidst the mundane faculty meeting minutes from 1754 appears a list, signed by Stith and agreed to by all five faculty members, prohibiting various student activities. The unanimous vote was apparently characteristic of Stith’s tenure, as Thad Tate remarks that “evidence of issues on which the faculty blocked Stith is scarce. The president seemed to get his way in putting into effect on his own authority a stricter disciplinary code for students and ordering the faculty to enforce it.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, Tate leaves this sense unresolved by quoting pivotal rector Dudley Digges as describing the majority-rule style of governance as a hindrance to Stith’s institutional ambitions.

The substance of the activities prohibited by the new regulations reveals two things. First, many of the forbidden pursuits were quite characteristically enjoyed by Virginians of all station, but especially by gentlemen.⁴⁸ Secondly, since Stith and the faculty saw these rules as appropriate or necessary, one might reasonably assume

45 Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 118

46 Gary, George W. “Catalogue of Alumni” from *The History of the College of William and Mary from its Foundation, 1660 to 1874*: pp. 84-86

47 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 89

48 Breen, T.H., “Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 34, No. 2. (Apr., 1977), pp. 239-257

that William and Mary scholars were guilty of participating in such activities somewhat regularly. One of the most common and beloved past times was of course, horse racing, but students were expressly forbidden from keeping “any race Horse, at ye College, in ye Town-or any where in the neighborhood” as well as from any involvement whatsoever in the activity of racing or betting. All horses presently kept in the area by such students were to be “immediately dispatched & sent off & never again brought back.”⁴⁹ This surely irked affected students.

It appears that the improper recreational habits of the “scholars” were conspicuous enough to demand six additional exclusions. The young men were thereafter not allowed to “appear playing or Betting, at ye Billiard or other gaming Tables, or be any way concern[e]d in keeping or fighting cocks.” This disallowance of multiple player games and diversions lightly underscores a rising willingness on the part of faculty to halt traditionally beloved social activities. The potential for tension from such a collision of priorities was not diminimous. The next rule speaks for itself in terms of how much it acknowledged the existence of friendly student groups who sought recreation together; they were ordered not to “frequent, or be seen, in ye Ordinaries, in or about ye Town, except they be sent for by their Relations, or other near Friends.” Stith’s fourth prohibition set the “Bounds of ye College” and forbade students from venturing beyond them, “particularly towards the mill pond with out ye express Leave” of a Master. Here again, one might reasonably posit that the Mill Pond was the location of some kind of unproductive

⁴⁹ Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1. (Jul., 1893), pp. 55

fun. The possession or bringing of “any Cards or Dice, or other Implement of Gaming” on campus was “deemed & adjudged a conviction, ipso Facto, of ye crime of gaming.” Again, Stith took a shot at a group activity associated with the members of the class that could afford higher education. The last of the new rules called for the general good deportment of the “scholar” who should not “think, or behave himself, as if he were subject to none but his own proper Master.” The final portion of the resolution assured, in timelessly authoritative fashion, that the posting of “clear and legible” copies of the new regulations would prevent the student who might attempt to “pretend Ignorance of ye forgoing Orders & Regulations.”⁵⁰ Here one cannot help but succumb to a small relation of how familiar and void of worth the excuse of ignorance sounds in face of punishment, even to this day.

The August 29 meeting of the faculty and masters in 1754 illuminated some concerns on the part of the faculty:

Mr Dawson is desired to acquaint Mr Kemp y’ ye President and Masters are very uneasy at his encourageing the boys to Engage in Racing, and other Diversions contrary to the Rules of the College, and that if he do not desist for ye future they are determined to make a proper Representation thereof to the Court.⁵¹

Thomas Dawson emerged voicing some concern for the students falling into such habits prohibited by Stith’s rules. His remarks reveal that he and the faculty were not forcefully taking action, but that they were “uneasy.” Though a further remark on the

⁵⁰ Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1. (Jul., 1893), pp. 55

⁵¹ Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2. (Oct., 1893), 123

individual in question fails to appear, the threat seems to be somewhat half-hearted. Dawson's very next recorded statement at the meeting was a "caution" for "Mr Holt ag[ains]t harbouring any of the College Boys," so it appears Dawson was upholding Stith's disciplinary atmosphere.⁵²

Stith seemed bent on laying down strict guidelines to order student behavior. On a separate occasion, he added three statutes addressing specific problems of disorderly behavior: "That no boy shall be permitted to saunter away his Time upon any of the College Steps or to be seen playing during School Hours." He forbade students from going into the kitchen or causing "any Disturbance there." In what obviously responds to a particular episode of students exploiting special treatment, the housekeeper was "strictly charged and commanded not to allow any Victuals whatever to be sent into Private Rooms to any Boys, excepting to such as are really sick."⁵³ It is not difficult to recognize that students in the past had not only abused the excuse of ignorance of a rule, but also feigned illness in order to gain special treatment or avoid work.

Such restrictions on spirited young men living in a bustling capital city were surely the cause of at least a little friction. Their social station likewise meant that they probably intended to emulate the recreational habits of their fathers, an intention clearly not harmonious with the vision of their William and Mary masters. Even if the records, many of which, it must be noted, do not survive for this period, fail to

52 *ibid*

53 Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College, undated, After Aug 29 1754, before Sept 2, 1755. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2. (Oct., 1893): 124-125

recount explosive evidences of protracted battles between students and their masters, these rules reveal growth, albeit slow and as an extension of social status customs, of a student culture at the College.

Stith's actions were forceful, even if he was at some time, outvoted by a majority of the faculty. His accession to the office of President had taken place amidst a brief storm of political and religious controversy; his term was equally brief. Passing away September 10, 1755, Stith's term as president had been the shortest yet. He left two pieces of unfinished business at his passing. An unfinished reform of the college statutes that he had convinced the Visitors to undertake, would turn out successfully by early 1756. Looming as a potentially huge disruption was the tobacco crop failure of 1755; it would bring strains to bear on the much tangled relationship among the colonial government, the Virginian clergy, and the College.

Just as the religious and political climate of the colony demanded that the leader of Virginia's college (and Virginia's church) command genuine respect and exercise firm authority, Thomas Dawson stepped into the office. The commentary on Dawson from historians of the period is brief but fairly uniform: he was not the man for the job. When he later moved up from his position as master of the Indian school, Dawson still lacked the strength to corral the vocal faculty, who were just about to become even more unified. Likewise, he had no skills with which to manage an increasingly independent student body. The Two Penny Act passed in an attempt to lighten the burden of a failed tobacco crop would lead off a series of controversies that, according to Tate, "would have severely tested a stronger president," but which

Dawson could simply not handle.⁵⁴ The man who assumed a role molded by the bold leadership of James Blair, by the skills of conciliation wielded by his older brother William, and by Stith's recent enthusiasm for discipline, would turn out to be an utter failure.

IV. "I Am Afraid"

In November of 1752, following his loss to William Stith for the College presidency, Commissary Thomas Dawson once again wrote the Bishop of London. The Bishop had requested an explanation of why Dawson had turned down a place on the Council, a role that had traditionally accompanied the office of Commissary, before he would proceed with making Dawson's Commission official. The Bishop's confusion was for good reason; a seat at the Council table provided the opportunity to wield real influence as Commissary. Dawson recounted an encounter with, "one of the Governors of the College," painting a scene in which a confident politician sought to smoothly navigate his ambitions around an obstacle. Dawson probably did not intend this imagery, or to appear as such a nervous pushover, but it is a challenge to see the scene much differently:

Col. Carter Burwell ... made me a visit and introduced a Discourse concerning a Successor to my Brother, Upon which I desired his vote for the Place of President. He answered he should always be my Friend, but he was afraid I should interfere with him, for the Governor has promised to recommend him for the first vacant Place in the Council, but he now supposed that I should be the Man. In this season of Distress I told him, that I was not at present ambitious of that Honour, and that I would wait upon the Governor's desire, that I might not interfere with him: Which I

⁵⁴ Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 89

accordingly did and also in conversation mentioned to his Honour, that I was willing to decline it, till I had thoroughly settled my Brother's affairs, which are much involved.⁵⁵

The end result of Burwell's political "visit" made it clear that Dawson was not cut from diplomatic cloth: Burwell had voted for Stith.⁵⁶ The Commissary had caved to traditional political maneuvering, and was conscious of this apparent weakness. He continued, attempting to assure Sherlock that he possessed the expected ambitions:

And this account I sent some time ago to Lady Gooch. But so far am I from being averse to a Place at the Council Board, that in the very same Letter I desired her Inter[cede] with Your Lordship to get me a seat there, and to acquaint Your Lordship, that it was always Sir William Gooch's Opinion, that Your Lordship's Commissary should be one of the Council. So that Your Lordship's Sentiments are the same with Sir Wm. Gooch's, with our present Governor's, with my own, and with all the Clergy & True Friends to the established Church.-_ If upon this Representation, your Lordship will be pleased to honour me with your Commission; and also, in Order to add Dignity and Authority to that Office, to procure me a Place at the Council Board, give me Leave to assure your Lordship that I will always exert my utmost Endeavors to promote the Good of the Church & the Salvation of Mankind...⁵⁷

It is almost as if Dawson must prove to himself, in writing, the proper course of his opinions and desires. His enthusiasm and ambition for the place at the Council evaporated as soon as Burwell confronted him, and he admitted as much, but knew

55 Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, November 24, 1752. Fulham Papers XIII:94-95.

56 Hockman, Daniel Mack. *The Dawson Brothers and the Virginia Commissariat, 1743-1760*.

Univeristy of Illinois at Urbana-Champsign, Ph. D., 1975, History, modern: 157

57Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, November 24, 1752. Fulham Papers XIII:94-95.

that his superior would frown upon this prevarication. So, by pointing out those who believe it proper that his position should include the prestige of a Council seat, Dawson convinces himself of it as well. Though a month later Sherlock did decide to grant him a seat at the Council table, the much needed theoretical addition of “Dignity and Authority” to his office, unfortunately for Dawson, never materialized.

In his next letter to Bishop Sherlock in July of 1753, Dawson wrote to convey, among other things, his heartfelt thanks for his appointment to Commissary from London. Only the sorrowful doubt he clearly harbors against his own abilities overshadows the painful sincerity of his words:

My obligations to Your Lordship for appointing me Commissary of this Colony, and also for obtaining me a Place at the Council Board, exceed all Acknowledgement. When I consider the vast Weight of these offices, and my own Weakness, I am afraid, lest I should not be able to support them. But humbly relying upon the Divine Goodness, & your Lordship’s for Assistance, I shall exert my sincere & constant Endeavors, and hope that some Failings will be pardoned, out of Regard to the Uprightness of my Heart.⁵⁸

Such sentiments appear in the letters of both weak and strong men. For the strong, and in the best cases, it turns out to be sincere modesty, for their actions hardly require pardon. But in the case of Thomas Dawson, though he felt a conscientious sense of responsibility, these words foreshadowed true weakness.

In his next paragraphs of the same July letter, Dawson goes on to address the ongoing struggle against the dissent of the New Light movement, about which he was concerned. He takes an uncharacteristically strong position in favor of pieces of

⁵⁸ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, July 23, 1753. Fulham Papers XIII:116.

legislation to prevent dissent, and to order the selection of new clergy for empty parishes, a process he noted could cause “as much Contention & Confusion at the Election of a Minister, as there commonly is at the Choice of a Representative of a County.”⁵⁹ Dawson pointed to these measures with hope that “in time” they could bring about a peaceful result: “Sincerely glad should I be to see that Uniformity of Religion restored for which this Colony was once famous, & Peace and Quietness established among us.” Before he could get too enthusiastic, he retreated once more to meekness and a bleak outlook: “Your Lordship may be assured, that I shall use my best, tho’ weak Endeavours to restrain them; but I am afraid, notwithstanding our utmost care, that these Ignis fatui will lead many, especially the lower and most ignorant sort, to Ruin & Destruction.” That seven months later Dawson had not received a response demonstrates well how slow, ineffective, and unpredictable was the speed of communication. Such lengthy delays could only hurt a man who relied so heavily on wielding proxy authority instead of his own.

Dawson again made a request for an official commission from the Bishop to enable him to call conventions of clergy. He pointed out that such assemblies had been

hitherto very rare in this Colony: Two or three only I believe in Mr. Blair’s time who was above 50 Years Commissary, and one only one, on account of the Rebellion, in 1746, in my Brother’s Time. But many worthy men are of Opinion with me, that more frequent Conventions would tend much to the good of our Church, the Reformation of the Clergy, & the Benefit of Mankind.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *ibid*, XIII:117

⁶⁰ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, March 11, 1754. Fulham Papers XIII:129

Dawson listed a great many benefits that such conventions would purportedly bring about, such as the raising of charitable funds for relief of the poor and the widowed, for the schooling of “poor Children and Negroes,” as well as for “that most excellent Charity, the buying and distributing religious Books and Tracts.” In this passage Dawson appears to have concerns and solutions, perhaps even a plan of attack. It is one of only a few times that Dawson’s words sound not just determined, but confidently hopeful. His acknowledgement that the clergy needed to be “acquainted with the Dignity and the Duties of their sacred Office,” along with his closing reference to “the gracious Acceptance of the Widow’s offering” as motivation for him to “cast my Mite,” an annual one guinea subscription, to a Dublin society which disseminated “pious Books and Tracts” underscores his concern about the quality, or lack thereof, of the Virginia clergy.

Commissary Dawson addressed the convention of clergy on October 30, 1754, at the College, following his sermon at the 10 A.M. service at Bruton Parish Church. His tone at the outset demonstrated enthusiasm for the idea of convening together to “advance the Interests of Religion, and promote the Safety and Prosperity of the Church as by Law established.”⁶¹ He touched upon the same topics he addressed in his March letter to the Bishop, attempting to rouse in his colleagues a passion for piety similar to his own, identifying “the blind Zeal of fanaticism on the one hand, and the furious Malice of Popery on the other,” as the chief challenges to their holy charge. Some of his best prose follows:

⁶¹ Proceedings of a convention of the clergy held at the College of William and Mary, October 30-31, 1754. Fulham Papers XIII:137

Let us not countenance the Disorder of the profane by our Despondency. They are not worse than they were at the first Preaching of the Gospel, when the Virtue and Courage of the Clergy prevailed over the united Violence of Men & Devils. And if we would live as exemplary, labour as faithfully & defend as courageously our Religion, as they did, we should not want the same Success.⁶²

While one could classify, albeit with some cynicism, such encouragement for his peers as ‘stock,’ but for Dawson the prose belays rare conviction. But, just as the trajectory of his message seemed to point spiritedly toward a higher goal, his thought process provided an oddly anticlimactic sentiment:

In the mean time, it behooves us to consider, that consequences are in the hand of God, but that duty is in ours:-That though our labour may be lost to our unhappy flock, it will not be lost to ourselves:-That though we save not others, we shall save our own souls, at the great day.

It hardly seems that Dawson’s message could be the best prodding for his robed colleagues. He could have offered just a slightly more hopeful outlook, saving a small percentage of their flocks’ souls perhaps. Dawson seems to be so content with advocating a personal pursuit of piety, that he nearly opens the door to conceding his religion’s age-old spiritual battle. His closing pledge to “do what I can” to provide his colleagues advice, and “heartily join in reforming whatever shall be found disorderly, or deficient,” buttresses his odd message somewhat, but it seems to reinforce the perception that Dawson adheres to a generalized, idealistic image of the pious reverend. The convention was, unfortunately, the peak of Dawson’s career. In retrospect, with the successful creation of his “Charity Scheme for the relief of

62 Proceedings of a convention of the clergy held at the College of William and Mary, October 30-31, 1754. Fulham Papers XIII:137-138

Clergymen's Widows and Orphans," that came out of this convention, Dawson could already have tallied all of the significant accomplishments he was to complete in his career as Commissary.⁶³ Sadly, the only memorable *and* positive achievement of his College presidency was his awarding an honorary Master's degree to Ben Franklin in 1756.

His timid attitude toward disorder and confrontation failed to aid him in roles of leadership in which he found himself largely unfit. His apparent desire to serve the ideal of piety, without ever needing to command a heavy presence as a leader, might have served him well in a time of order and peace, and he might have presided over the colony's church just as his brother William had, but Thomas's moment was rife with bickering and maneuvering. Instead of political prowess, Dawson most often exhibited unnecessary timidity. For example, as he opened a letter to the Bishop of London several months since his last, he needlessly apologized for writing again, despite the fact that the letter was a proper and reasonably expected referral for a minister returning to England from Virginia.⁶⁴ Writing in 1755 to the Bishop, he again tempered the forecast of his efforts, promising to "exert my honest tho' weak Endeavors to promote the Good of this Church."⁶⁵ Then in August of 1755, Dawson once again meekly requested a commission, a copy of which he apparently had not yet received, because without this piece of paper, he clearly lacked confidence:

I cannot help mentioning to the Bishop of London, that even a Commission as in former Times, if his Lordship's Want of Health prevents his taking out a Patent,

63 Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, June, 10 1755. Fulham Papers XIII: 186

64 Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, July 28, 1754. Fulham Papers XIII:130

65 Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, June, 10 1755. Fulham Papers XIII:187

would add Weight and Authority to the Commissary: However at the same Time I beg his Lordship's Pardon for the Remark, and heartily pray for the happy Restoration of his Health.⁶⁶

It appears that Dawson possessed barely enough courage to make this bureaucratic request, especially in light of the pavid apology with which he so quickly followed. A man who almost systematically avoided offending or disappointing anyone was unlikely to have success in a prominent position of leadership in Virginia's elaborately political atmosphere, much less in two of those positions.

V. "A Lover of Peace & Quietness"

When forty-year-old Thomas Dawson took over the office of William and Mary College president November 1, 1755, he could not have done so at a more inopportune time.⁶⁷ With the year's tobacco crop lost to an unusually lengthy drought, Virginia's General Assembly attempted to alleviate the lack of currency that such a blow caused. To do this, the Assembly passed the Two Penny Act, which allowed all debts to be paid in paper money instead the now scarce and thus much more valuable tobacco, at two pence per pound, thus minimizing financial fallout. Virginia's Governor Dinwiddie and the Assembly probably did not foresee the level of outrage their action would elicit from the clergy, whose salaries were assigned in pounds of tobacco, but being members of the gentry, they very likely did not care.

⁶⁶ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, August 13, 1755. Fulham Papers XIII:198

⁶⁷ James Blair's nephew John wrote the Bishop to endorse Thomas Dawson for the Commissariat, and revealed that Dawson had been born in April of 1715. John Blair to Bishop Sherlock, July 25, 1752. "Documents Relating to the Early History of the College" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd ser. Vol. 20, No. 2. April, 1940. p. 229.

Four clerical professors petitioned the Bishop of London concerning what they perceived as a direct affront to their station; William Preston, William Graham, and Thomas Robinson all signed a lengthy letter to the Bishop penned by the most reactionary among the faculty, Rev. John Camm. Dawson refused to be a part of this “Parson’s Cause,” because, as J.E. Morpurgo points out, he hardly wished to “fly into the face of his benefactor,” Dinwiddie, who had been supportive of him for his appointments.⁶⁸ Instead, Dawson sought advice in a letter to the Bishop full of his trademark prevarication. He asserted that the Two Penny Act was “calculated rather for the Benefit and Advantage of the Rich than the Poor,” but that the clergy would still receive a better exchange rate for their tobacco quantities than as usual. He did not know what to do, and needed instruction:

whatever is your Lordship’s Opinion in this Matter, I most humbly beg that You would be pleased to favour me with it, for tho’ I should be very sorry to make any unreasonable Opposition or unjustly complain of the Legislature of the Country; yet I think it is my Duty to endeavour to support the Clergy in the Rights and Priveleges: The Station Your Lordship has placed me in requires it of me.

Some of our Body were zealous to have a Convention immediately, in Order to make a publick Representation to your Lordship; but as I was always a Lover of Peace & Quietness, I judged this private Report the more eligible way.⁶⁹

Fortunately for Dawson, the Bishop could wade through jostled grammar. A different set of clergymen, none of whom served as professors, sent a second letter of petition a year later, but no further political combat occurred before the following

⁶⁸ Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 119

⁶⁹ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, February 25, 1756. Fulham Papers, XIII:221.

two more successful crops cooled the situation.⁷⁰ Dawson had tried to conceal his meek character under the guise of operational style, but subsequent challenges provided larger glimpses of his weakness, both of his character and of his position.

Dawson wrote in July of 1757 to inform the Bishop of a situation revolving around the more-vile-than-Reverend, John Brunskill, Jr., of Prince William County's Hamilton Parish. Referring to Brunskill's "most abominable course of life" and "evil example," Dawson took pains to justify his lack of action on the complaint that Hamilton's vestry had submitted to him against their minister. One of Prince William County's representatives had brought the complaints to the General Assembly, and Dawson agreed, at Dinwiddie's urging,

to ...proceed against the said Brunskill in a judicial manner. But as I was sensible, that I had gone already as far as I had Power to do, I acquainted his Honor that I had not sufficient Authority to exercise any Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, as to proceed, even in the most notorious Cases, either to Suspension or Deprivation, but that I would consult with some of the Clergy, make a Report to your Lordship, and consider of some Method, if possible, to remove so great a Scandal from amongst us.⁷¹

Dawson was flattering himself in thinking he was "Sensible," as the adjective fails to capture what might better be described as 'reluctant to act.' At least Dinwiddie would have agreed, as he, according to Dawson, subsequently did some consulting of his own with his council. They located precedent during James Blair's tenure for "irregular Clergymen" being handled by—conveniently—the Governor and his council. Dawson reported that Dinwiddie, "would not pay the least regard to the little

⁷⁰ The Clergy of Virginia to the Bishop of London, February 25, 1756. Perry, William Stevens. *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church: Virginia*. Hartford, Connecticut. The Church Press, 1870 :440-446

⁷¹ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, July 9, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:236-237.

authority I could pretend to,” but Dawson himself had already admitted that he felt he had none.

Governor Dinwiddie had requested relief of his position, due to health reasons, in the second half of 1757. In fact, according to his last letter regarding the College in September of that year, he had expected to be able to offer the Bishop of London greetings in person, but was still in Williamsburg, so he could summarize recent controversies pertaining to the church and the college. By this time he had grown tired of the faculty clerics who seemed to jump at the chance to make trouble, and was unafraid to paint their portrait in a negative light. He addressed the Brunskill case first. Dinwiddie informed the Bishop that the “Vestry & many of the Gentlemen of that Parish” had made a complaint against Brunskill, for “monstrous immoralities, profane Swearing, Drunkenness, & very immodest Actions.”⁷² Likewise he recounted that Dawson could not “take Recognisence of the Complaint” because he “had no Commission from your Lordship.”

Upon receiving Dinwiddie’s order prohibiting him from further ministry, the disgruntled Brunskill had taken action of his own. Just after writing his initial letter to the Bishop about Brunskill, Dawson received a copy of the following “Advertisement, consisting of the 122 Canon, with the following Remark, in Mr. Brunskill’s own Hand Writing” with the heading, “No Sentence for Deprivation”:

N.B. “According to the above mentioned Canon I look upon the Letter of Deprivation brought up or said to be brought up from our Governor by Mr. Joseph Blackwell to be a Forgery otherwise a Nullity. Notwithstanding the late Proceedings

⁷² Gov. Dinwiddie to Bishop Sherlock, September 12, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:240

I am still lawful Minister of Hamilton Parish and shall continue to officiate as formerly. Given under my Hand this 18th Day of June 1757. John Brunskill.

Dawson believed that this notice was not Brunskill's idea, but that the troubled minister had succumbed to the bad advice of others, most likely including the "advice" of the bottle. Dawson was frank in an explanation of Brunskill's probable motivation: "the unhappy Man is almost constantly drunk." Of course this appears to have been all the more reason for the Commissary to have done something about this disgraceful situation, but evidence of Dawson's instincts never suggest impromptu decision as his strong suit.

Dawson had the appointment as Commissary, but the physical commission was supposedly still forthcoming from the Bishop. Had Dawson taken a slightly unorthodox course and simply ignored the paperwork issue, he might have handled the Brunskill charges himself. Instead he lacked the confidence to act without his commission documents, and refused to be a part of Dinwiddie's trial.⁷³ So, Dawson took a firm stance, but it was conveniently outside the ring. Unsurprisingly, the always confident Dinwiddie was more than happy to wield authority by himself where jurisdiction was even slightly unclear.

Dinwiddie explained to the Bishop the verdict he oversaw in the General Court, all the while unknowingly misspelling Brunskill's name, first as "Brumskill," then just a page later as "Broomskill"; he had no such trouble nailing down a guilty verdict. After consulting with his Council, he had agreed that he was, by his 81st instruction as Governor, "impowered to remove any Minister of So Scandalous a

⁷³ Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 91

Life & Conversation,” which read as follows: “If any Parson already prefer’d to any Benefice shall appear to give you Scandal, either by his doctrine or manners, you are to use the best means for the removal of him.”⁷⁴ He added justification to his actions by finally revealing just what gruesome deeds Brunskill had perpetrated:

[Dinwiddie’s council] further advised me to remove & deprive him ... from Officiating as a Minister in any Church in this Dominion, which I accordingly put in force & doubt not will meet with your Lordship’s Approbation, as no Other method was found to punish a person almost Guilty of every Sin except Murder, and this Last he had very near perpetrated on his own Wife by tying her up by the Leggs to the bedpost and cutting her in a [cruel] manner with Knives, & guilty of So many Indecencies, that Modesty forbids my troubling Yo. with a detail of.⁷⁵

J.E. Morpurgo hardly exaggerated when he awarded Brunskill the notoriety of being “probably the most unsavory alumnus in the history of the College,” but the dynamics of authority were ultimately more important.⁷⁶ Dinwiddie picked up an opportunity to publicly prove himself a proactive figure of authority and Dawson’s reluctance constituted an inadvertent cession of power to civil authority.

While the matter of a crazed and violent minister is the issue that would seem to have been the most pressing for the clergy at the time, the way in which Dinwiddie handled the situation became much more significant to them. The Virginia clergy was, as any clerical body usually is, protective of its position within the colony’s balance of power. As Dawson recounted, immediately upon discerning how Dinwiddie justified his authority in the situation, members of the clergy became

74 Recorded by N. Walthoe. Record of Council Meeting May 20, 1757. In Perry, Vol. I, 450

75 Governor Dinwiddie to the Lord Bishop of London. 12 Sept. 1757. Perry, I, 455.

76 Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 121

“alarmed ... and greatly afraid of future attempts” to disregard the Rights and Privileges of the Clergy as defined by Canon.⁷⁷ In order to address this encroachment of civil authority onto clerical matters, John Camm, William Preston, William Robinson and Thomas Robinson approached Dawson:

Four of them waited upon me, and earnestly desired a Meeting of the whole Body, that they might address Your Lordship, complain of it, and entreat a Commission for me, in Order to prevent this Lay Jurisdiction over the Clergy for the future: And indeed I should have complied with their Request; but our Apprehensions at this Time of a barbarous Enemy, some violent Heats and Animosities I expected, the want of sufficient Authority, the very Hot Season of the Year, and the great Distance (100 or 200 Miles) many of them lived from the College, induced me to refuse them, and at the same Time to assure them that I would make a true Representation of the whole to your Lordship.⁷⁸

So, with another letter full of excuses Dawson accomplished nothing but delay. This time he included not one, but two meek reminders that he still needed his commission paperwork, the second in reference to any further potential tobacco troubles:

You have pointed out a Method how to proceed should the Legislation make any future Attempt as to our Income, and a Commission from the Bishop of London would intirely put a Stop to this Second Encroachment.⁷⁹

These four activist clergymen went ahead and tried to call a convention, and John Camm and William Robinson even invited Brunskill to preach in their parish

⁷⁷ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, July 9, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:236-237.

⁷⁸ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, July 9, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:236-237.

⁷⁹ Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, July 9, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:237

churches, as a display of extra disdain for Dinwiddie's actions. Dinwiddie informed the Bishop that he had supported Dawson's refusal to call a convention, and that the rebellious faculty's failed attempt to call one themselves was contemptible:

At the time appointed there were only 9 appeared in Town, four of which were professors in the College, notwithstanding 2 of that body had rid about the country, and taken incredible pains by notorious falsehoods to inveigle as many as possible into their Cabal; Does not this conduct, my Lord, appear in direct contempt of Gov't...& is not such a secret conventicle in order to raise disturbance & animosity in the Country inconsistent with the Canons of our Church?⁸⁰

Dinwiddie could see just how blatant the clerical faculty's disrespect for the authority of the Commissary was. Through consistent attempts to remain neutral through inaction, the President and Commissary who had who had once been called "the Darling of the Professors"⁸¹ had indeed lost all of the respect of his colleagues, with other conflict between the Visitors and Faculty both ongoing and still ahead. Indeed, just ahead for the College was the nadir of the conditions historian Robert Polk Thomson described without embellishment as "pathetically absurd."⁸²

VI. "This Upstart, Violent Party"

A simultaneous situation had erupted on the grounds of William and Mary, one in which the faculty had taken action against student misbehavior. At the May 3 meeting of the President and Masters in 1756, the faculty had recorded an important vote:

80 Governor Dinwiddie to the Lord Bishop of London. 12 Sept. 1757. Perry, I, 457

81 Dudley Digges to Bishop Terrick, July 15, 1767. Fulham Papers, XIV:121

82 Thomson, Robert Polk. "The Reform of the College of William and Mary: 1763-1780," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 115, No. 3, (June 17, 1971), p. 190.

Resol: unanimously, [That] Cole Digges & Matthew Hubard be expelled [from] College of W & Mary not only for [their] remarkable Idleness & bad Behaviour in general, but particularly for whipping [the] little Boys in [the] Grammar School - for Obstinacy & Disrespect to [the] Grammar Master, & refusing to answer before [the] President & Masters [the] complaints made [against them].

Resol: unanimously, [That] any young Gentlemen, who shall keep Company with [the] said Cole Digges & Matthew Hubard, or shew [them] any countenance, shall be looked upon as their abettors & punished accordingly.

Resol: unanimously, [That their] Parents be acquainted with [the] above Resolves, & desired to keep [them from] coming within [the] College Bounds, otherwise [the] Society will cause them to be punished by the Civil Magistrate.⁸³

That Matthew Hubbard and Cole Digges were members of influential Virginia families fueled the flames of struggle that had been flickering between the faculty clerics and their secular board of oversight the Visitors and Governors of the College since the charter had been established.

Not only had the faculty expelled these young men, but it had officially ostracized them. Threatening to make the situation a civil case just added insult to injury. Thad Tate observes that the faculty “could hardly have expected that the ... Visitors would react so punitively against what appeared to be serious breaches of discipline,” but then again, the Faculty members would have been kidding themselves if they expected something weak in the way of retaliation from the Visitors.⁸⁴ On the other hand, Morpurgo allows for two possibilities that should

⁸³ Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College. May 3, 1756, *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 2. No. 4. (April 1894) p. 256

⁸⁴ Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 92

really be combined: the possibility that this action was meant as a direct challenge to the Board, or that the Faculty “had not reckoned with or had refused to recognize the dangers.”⁸⁵ It appears that the Faculty did indeed issue a challenge, and that it also probably ignored the potential risk of doing so. In the sociopolitical atmosphere of Virginia’s capital city, anyone thinking ahead would have known that the treatment of sons of gentlemen as petty criminals would most likely elicit a rageful response. The Visitors all but declared war on the faculty after further controversy arose surrounding Matthew Hubard’s brother.

Hubard’s brother James, an alumnus who was working as the College usher at the time, all but forced the hand of the Faculty to his own firing, when he

behaved to the President & Masters in a most scandalous, impudent, & unheard of Manner, by breaking into the Room, when they were examining upon account of his bad Behaviour, forcing away his Brother in opposition to every known Rule of the College, nay even of common Decency & good Manners.⁸⁶

The elder Hubard appeared before the Faculty the following day and begged for and received a pardon, citing the “Heat of Passion excited by brotherly Affection ... not the Effect of Deliberation.”⁸⁷ When James was fired again after continuing his poor behavior to the point that the faculty officially considered him “the chief occasion for the present Disorders in the College,” the Visitors took their first step toward

⁸⁵ Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 123

⁸⁶ Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College. Undated, falls between May and September of 1756. Passage [59], *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 2. No. 4. (April 1894) p. 257

⁸⁷ *ibid*

asserting their dominance, and chose a target for revenge in Professor Thomas Robinson.

Though, as Tate notes, Robinson had held the position of Grammar School Master for fifteen years, he had also made the accusations against Matthew Hubbard and Cole Digges that ultimately led to their dismissal, and thus had painted on his own back a red crosshairs for the Visitors, who were looking for a target. On May 20, 1757, a year after the expulsion vote that had so irked them, the Board declared Thomas Robinson, “by Reason of his bodily infirmities ... incapable of discharging the Duties of his Office” and requested a replacement, who should immediately be informed of his new “Salary and Dependance.”⁸⁸ Even more important to the picture of the conflict, they specifically requested a layman in his place, “because the Visitors have observed that the appointing a Clergyman to be Master of this Grammar School, has often proved a Means of the School’s being neglected, in Regard of his frequent Avocations as a Minister.”⁸⁹ Further insulting to Robinson was the Board’s request that he stay in his office, knowing he had been fired, for another six months. Rev. Preston, a Master in the Philosophy School, notified the Board in the same meeting that he would be leaving for England, in an attempt to escape the wrath of the obviously angered Board.

Robinson, who by his own account had recovered and returned to work “near two Months” before the Visitors meeting, sent a spirited letter in his defense to the

⁸⁸ Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, May 20, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:227

⁸⁹ Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, May 20, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:227

Bishop, providing facts that illuminated the Visitors' decision to fire him as cold-hearted revenge.⁹⁰ He first emphasized an important but subtle point: the Visitors had cited his illness in a request for his replacement, implying, in sly fashion, that he might have been in total cooperation with the request, indeed that he might have made it himself. This was false, as "neither I nor any Master of the College, knew, or suspected any Thing of such Proceeding, 'till several Days after and could not come at any Certainty about it, 'till a month after."⁹¹ The action of the Visitors in his opinion appeared to be, "a strange Kind of Proceeding, and looks as if they themselves were asham'd of if at the Time." He had not been notified beforehand and had not received an opportunity to defend himself in person. Robinson was angry, and his bitter sarcasm revealed it:

And if a fit of sickness be a sufficient Reason for depriving a Man of his Living, let the Person Your Lordship is requested to procure for them, look to it; for 'tis a thousand to one but he will have soon after his Arrival a pretty smart one, a Seasoning, as 'tis here called, and then at this Rate he is liable at Pleasure to be sent back by the next Shipping, at least to be turn'd out in a strange Country to shift for himself, or rather hang himself, if he pleases, which I take to be the true Meaning of the Word Dependance in their Decree.⁹²

90 Thomas Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, June 30, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII, 229. This letter, though referenced as his effort at self defense in the histories of the College, contains a unique perspective and raw commentary of far more value than other researchers have thus far taken note.

91 Thomas Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, June 30, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII, 228

92 Thomas Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, June 30, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII, 229

Continuing with his rebuke of the Visitors, Robinson protested their reasoning on every point. Accused of letting his ministerial duties interfere with his post as Grammar School Master, he informed the Bishop that he had no parish, and had only preached on one day for a friend as a favor, and that in fact, “What might have been done in the Time of their Grandfathers, I cannot say, but I have never heard of a Master of the Grammar School, who was even chosen into a Parish,” except temporarily.⁹³

In the letter’s most valuable passages, Robinson made it abundantly clear that he suffered from no confusion as to why this situation had fallen on him:

I cannot conceive, what makes ‘em so very desirous of having a Lay-man; except it being that they may have him more under their Thumbs, and make him as supple as a slave. For should such a one give the least Offence to any of them, or indeed any of their Children or Relations (and if he does not, and at the same Time does his Duty, I should wonder) out he must go, and then he not on the same Footing with a Clergyman, who may stand a Chance to find Refuge in a Parish, whilst the poor Man will have Nothing else left him to do, but to ship himself home again and surprise all England with the strange Adventures of his Travels.⁹⁴

The outraged Master closed with an explanation of the usher Hubard case that was, in his opinion, as well as in the opinions of “everybody else,” the “true Foundation” of his “approaching Ruin.” Robinson stated that he had admonished the usher “pretty smartly for Behaviour, which the President and all the Masters agree’d deserv’d immediate Expulsion.” Here arose an opportunity to at the very least, take a position other than the fetal, but Thomas Dawson abstained. The void created by his failure to

⁹³ Thomas Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, June 30, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:230-231

⁹⁴ Thomas Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, June 30, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII: 232

assert authority did not escape Robinson's comprehension of the situation; indeed, his next words provided a precious, personal glimpse of the meek administrator: "But thro' the Timidity of the President, (which he would fain construe into Presidential Reasons) it was at last carry'd that he should be continued some Time longer."⁹⁵ Not only did Robinson accurately read Thomas Dawson as timid, but, more subtly, that Dawson actively clothed this timidity as his style of leadership. To add further credence to the message of his letter, Professors William Preston, Richard Graham, John Camm, and Emmanuel Jones, all signed on to an addendum on the final page pledging its accuracy.⁹⁶ It is no surprise that one faculty name is glaringly absent from this brazen display of confidence addressed to their superior and speaking against their counterpart body of gentlemen: Thomas Dawson.

The Visitors, well on their way down an anachronistic path, next established a committee to investigate James Hubard's dismissal. It was "alleged" at the November 1 meeting of the Visitors, that there was no justification to fire the usher, and that the dismissal had "given such public Offense, that several of the Scholars," were "about to leave the College."⁹⁷ According to William Robinson's summary of the Visitor's meeting, "it was alleged, but no body told upon what information, that the Masters had turned out the Usher for a pique."⁹⁸ The board members present also asserted their disagreement with the masters' opinion, as the Board believed that the

95 Thomas Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, June 30, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII 233

96 Thomas Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, June 30, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII 234.

97 Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, November 1, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:242.

98 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 292

elder Hubbard had demonstrated diligence. The Visitors wanted control of this decision, and William Robinson observed that the faculty began to interpret this desire into the notion that the Visitors “intended to take from them the Ordinary Government of the College.”⁹⁹ The appearance of their tact as self-servingly arbitrary, and perhaps somewhat authoritarian, was not lost on at least one unnamed Visitor, who alluded to another authoritarian body to Robinson, in comparison to their own:

Another of the Committee could not I suppose be far from my sentiments. For he ask'd me, as we went to the Committee, whether this was not something like a certain Court on the other side of the water. Meaning, as I understood him, the Inquisition.¹⁰⁰

As the Visitors questioned the faculty concerning their motives for firing the usher, they failed to make progress. Dawson displayed a rare but small streak of commitment in asserting his position that the faculty had already provided the required reason for their dismissal of Hubbard. John Camm took the resistance further, and insisted that to answer for their decision to the Visitors, they would in essence be surrendering their own authority to the review of a higher body and so refused, “alleging that he was sworn to observe the Statutes, by which the sole Power of appointing or removing an Usher is in the President and Masters.”¹⁰¹

When the other professors announced their agreement, the Chairman of the Visitors

⁹⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 293

¹⁰¹ Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, November 1, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:24

revealed his casual attitude toward the College's laws when he remarked sarcastically that they "have a right to put in and turn out an Usher by Statute, that he could read English, but the Statutes were not the laws of the Medes and the Persians."¹⁰²

At ten o'clock in the morning on November 11, the Visitors went through the charter in order to "examine wherein the Masters had transgressed: no particular transgression appeared."¹⁰³ The Visitors used democracy to solve this technical problem: "It was then put to the Vote whether the Masters had transgressed the Charter & Statutes and carried in the Affirmative by a majority."¹⁰⁴ The Board next brought in the Masters and asked them if they still refused to provide further information for their dismissal of Hubbard, and they confirmed it. Having given the order for the professors to leave the room, they then voted to order them out of their jobs. They fired Camm, Graham, and Jones, citing their steadfast refusal to justify the firing of James Hubbard as being "repugnant to the Charter and Statutes of the College," and as preventing the Visitors from "a Power to enquire into the Conduct of the Masters in the ordinary Government of the College, on which its well-being entirely depends."¹⁰⁵ Through this unfounded vote, the Board had chosen a path of arbitrary decision-making, comically stereotypical tool of many boards throughout history, but got backing from the royal proxy.

102 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 293

103 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 294

104 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 294

105 Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of the College of William and Mary, November 11, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:243

Governor Dinwiddie's review of the state of the College in his final letter to the Bishop is significant in its manipulative negativity. It appears that Thad Tate is correct in positing that the Visitors were "leaving it to Governor Dinwiddie, who was one of their number, to prepare an escalated group of charges against Robinson and to add Preston to the indictment," thus reinforcing their actions.¹⁰⁶

The Visitors of the College, and indeed the Country in general, have for many years been greatly Dissatisfied with the behavior of the Professor of Philosophy [William Preston] and the master of the Grammar School [Thomas? Robinson], not only on Acc[oun]t of Intemperance & Irregularity laid to [their] Charge, but also because they had married, and, contrary to all Rules of Seats of Learning, kept their Wives, Children & Servants in Colledge which must Occasion much Confusion & disturbance. And the Visitors having often expressed their Disapprobation of their Familys remaining in Colledge, about a year ago they remov[e]d them into Town, & Since that time, as if they had a Mind to to Shew their Contempt of the Visitors, they have liv[e]d much at home, and negligently attended their duty in Colledge.¹⁰⁷

Through Dinwiddie's allusion to an older (and very minor) offense, he established for the Bishop some history of misbehavior by the professors that the Visitors had fired, in order to further justify the dismissals. Professor Preston, about

106 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 93. Morpurgo's words on the subject (*Their Majesties' Royall Colledge*, 123) are strikingly close: "...the Visitors decided to strengthen their case against Robinson and to bracket Preston with him in their condemnation."

107 Dinwiddie Papers, II: 695-696. Also, the received copy: Gov. Dinwiddie to Bishop Sherlock, September 12, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:241. Some of Dinwiddie's handwriting in the Fulham copy is illegible, but in other places it has proved more legible than the draft copy transposed in the Dinwiddie Papers, in which there are several discrepancies, attributable to transposition error or Dinwiddie's own changes from his draft to the dispatched copy.

whom Dinwiddie wrote, was “a warm, turbulent Man, and I fear has been the Chief Promoter of all the Disturbances lately here,” had resigned and had announced he was returning to England. The Indian School Master Emmanuel Jones was given an opportunity in front of the Visitors to save his position:

He was ask'd, whether he acknowledg'd the Power of the Visitors to enquire into the ordinary Government of the College. He answer'd yes, and was immediately restored to his Place. When this was told to the rest, they all asserted that if they had been call'd and questioned in the same manner they would have made the same answer.¹⁰⁸

That left the fired Masters Graham, Camm and Robinson, who were still refusing to accept their dismissals and refusing to leave their apartments. The impotent pair of Jones and Dawson formally instructed the three in rebellion to vacate the College premises, but encountered refusal. Instead of taking a stronger stance, the duo consulted “eminent lawyers”, to no avail.¹⁰⁹ These men had no respect for Dawson and his office. Dinwiddie observed this:

The Profess[o]rs of the College took it in [their] Heads to make resentment against the President of the College, your Commissary, using him with much ill manners, & when the poor Gentleman was Sick & weak, having been much afflicted with the Fever & Ague this Summer, they have refus[e]d him any Assistance in his Ministerial Duty, And indeed, for the Last Six months not one of them have come to

108 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 295.

109 Morpurgo, *Their Majesties' Royall Colledge*, 124

Church ... w[hi]c[h] was ever esteem[e]d part of their Duty in Order to see that the Scholars behav[e]d well.¹¹⁰

Dawson's inability to handle an institution caught up in conflict would be as obvious to the next governor, but Dinwiddie saved the most generalized and biting comments concerning the rebellious professors as he began to close his last letter to the Bishop:

Nay, they have quite ruin[e]d [this] Seminary of Learning, the people declar[ing] they will not send [their] Childr[e]n to the College till there is a new Sett of professors, and many of them have Already Sent their Children to Philad[elphi]a for Educat[i]o[n] which is 300 Miles from this, and attended with double the charges for Education as that of the College of William and Mary.

By depicting the state of the College as bad enough that parents had started to send their sons elsewhere, Dinwiddie clearly used every possible tool at his disposal to convince the Bishop of his case against the rebellious professors. The College was the only institution training clergymen in Virginia, and the Bishop knew, from one of Thomas Dawson's 1755 letters, that the Virginia gentlemen were "particularly fond of Clergymen born and bred here; and indeed with good reason, for the Parishes have been supplied from our College with better Ministers (all of them being well reported of) than usually come from abroad."¹¹¹ Whether or not Dinwiddie was aware that the Bishop was in possession of this perspective, it certainly made his commentary all the more portentous.

110 Dinwiddie Papers, II, 698. Gov. Dinwiddie to Bishop Sherlock, September 12, 1757. Fulham Papers, XIII:241

111 Thomas Dawson to Bishop Sherlock, June, 10 1755. Fulham Papers XIII:187

Concerned that the College President appeared weak, the outgoing governor provided Thomas Dawson some much needed backing in his closing paragraphs, portraying him as an undeserving victim:

Their Resentment against the Commissary and President is without any just Foundation unless from his repeated Charges to them to be regular in the Conduct & diligent in discharge of their Duty.

In Justice to Mr. Dawson your Commissary I must Assure your Lordship there is not a Clergyman in the Country of a more upright Life, or that Discharge their duty with more care & [word illegible], his Examples & Conversation is Agreeable to his profession's & is esteemed by the Clergy & people in general, this upstart Violent party excepted. And if they Should by the Professor, who it is Said, is to be their Agent & to do Great Matters at home, be So unjust to him as to represent him Otherwise to Your Lordship, I beg You'll Suspend Your Opinion till I have the Honour to See You, [which] I expect will be Soon.¹¹²

Again, Thomas Dawson had a chance to step up and at least try to be a leader, but in his typical wavering fashion he failed to do so. The faculty had adapted to Dawson's inaction and taken matters into their own hands. Dawson simply was not capable of asserting himself as the President and Commissary, and guiding his colleagues through their interaction with the Visitors. Instead, he waited, wishing for some power he believed rested in his missing commission papers, and watched the institutions for which he was by title responsible, begin to show cracks under extreme pressure.

112 *ibid.* The final portion of commentary on Thomas Dawson beginning with "unless from his repeated Charges to them," does not appear in the draft copy of the letter within the Dinwiddie Papers, but in the received copy within the Fulham Papers, indicating that Dinwiddie added it after he had copied out his initial draft.

VII. “The Greatest of Confusion”

The strongly negative sentiments that Dinwiddie held toward what he saw as a troublesome faculty contrasted greatly with the formal welcome address that the newly arrived Governor Francis Fauquier received on the twelfth of June, 1758. Nearly identical to the one the faculty had delivered to Dinwiddie upon his arrival, the formal address revealed nothing of the controversies which the opposing parties had found themselves embroiled in:

Permit us, Sir, to assure your Honour, that, in grateful Return, we shall always endeavour, both by Example and Doctrine, to promote the Happiness and Tranquility of your Government, and constantly offer up our fervent Prayers to the Great Governor of the Universe, that he would be graciously pleased to confer his Blessings upon your Labours, in the Discharge of the arduous Duties of your important Station.¹¹³

A new trio of well-educated ministers replaced those who had been officially dismissed from the faculty. William Small’s name is the most famous of the three, mainly for his association with then student Thomas Jefferson, and his contribution to the study of science at the College. The other two, Goronwy Owen and Jacob Rowe, lived lives quite the opposite of their new colleague, despite possessing the requisite respectable academic pedigrees. Gov. Fauquier had received his education at Oxford’s Queen’s College. Tate calls him a man “of markedly greater intellectual accomplishment than the typical colonial governor.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, he became friends

113 The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, 1758-1768, Volume I, p. 27.

114 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 95

with William Small and later with George Wythe. This cadre, along with a few others, like Goronwy Owen, met regularly for intellectual discourse at the Governor's Palace, and provided mentoring to Jefferson. Fauquier's response to President Dawson and the masters, (at this date probably just Owen, Jones, and Edward Lewis Goodwin) was hopeful:

Nothing can be more acceptable to me than your Professions of Attachment to his Majesty and his Government, and on that Account, of Respect to me.... The Cause of Religion shall always be uppermost in my Thoughts, as that is the Cement of Government; and as the Church and Clergy in general, so the College in particular, may always claim my Patronage. I hope your Prayers to the Divine Majesty, for which I stand greatly obliged to you, will prevail on Him to confer his Blessing on my Endeavors to make the People easy and happy under my Administration.¹¹⁵

Despite this second round of a governor's allusions to a potentially auspicious relationship with the masters of the College, the clerical faculty would soon feel their own priorities sway them to further missions of disruption.

The failure of Virginia's all-important tobacco crop in 1758, along with an economy generally weakened from the ongoing French and Indian War, led to a second round of the Parson's Cause movement. The irascible new Professor of Moral Philosophy, Jacob Rowe, soon showed that he would make his opinions known at least as loudly as his predecessors. Virginia's House of Burgesses ordered him arrested by the sergeant at arms after his "scandalous and malicious" denouncement of the House's new Two Penny Act was summarized as follows:

115 Fauquier Papers, I, 27-28

“How many of the House of Burgesses were to be hanged?” That every Member who should vote for settling the Parsons Salaries in Money, would be Scoundrels, and that, if any Member wanting to receive the Sacrament, was to apply to him, he would refuse to administer it.”¹¹⁶

Rowe managed to talk his way out of custody through a statement of apology that was read aloud at the next day’s meeting, informing the Burgesses that he was:

sincerely sorry for his Offence, which was committed without any evil Intention or Design to derogate from the Dignity and Honor of this House, in a private conversation at his Friend’s House, without knowing the Gentleman then present to be a Member, and to which he was too easily and indiscreetly provoked by some rude Expressions used by some of the Company, against that sacred Order to which he belongs.¹¹⁷

Rowe would re-enter the scene in a blaze of disruption later.

Far from being an episode in (supposedly) uncharacteristic selfishness on the part of men of the cloth, their financial security was significantly threatened by this legislation. Because of the rise in the price of tobacco following the severe shortage, each clergyman should have been entitled, according to the original salary amount of 16,000 pounds of tobacco, to £400 sterling. By the Two Penny Act, this amount was reduced to a third, but because it was paid in paper money, it was closer to being utterly worthless. Morpurgo’s take on it brings a smile to one’s face: “It was enough

116 McIlwaine, Henry Read, and Kennedy, John Pendleton, eds., Record of September 21, 1758. Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1758-1761. Accessed through Swem Library online at <http://www.heinonline.org/>, p. 16

117 *ibid*, 17-18

to make a saint bitter and there were few saints among Virginia's clergy. The parsons redoubled their efforts to thwart the Governor and the General Assembly."¹¹⁸

The feisty John Camm, having been dismissed from his College post, retained his clerical office. Once again he took up the cause to organize a meeting of the clergy of Virginia in order to formally protest both the Two Penny Act, as well as his dismissal. Always one to avoid confrontations, especially those of a particularly organized, risky, and public type, this time Dawson resisted. Because in this case most of Virginia's Anglican ministers wanted to seek some kind of reform action, Dawson caved to the demand. He most likely feared that Camm would carry through with his threat to bring together a meeting without his authority. Being at least an intelligent man, Dawson may have simply recognized that submitting once more to pressure was better than being ignored. In a petition Camm drew up as the audacious "representative" that he was, he emphasized that the paper money with which their salaries were to be fulfilled was "of no intrinsic Worth of itself and of no value out of this Dominion."¹¹⁹ Camm departed for London as representative to present his case and the case of the clergy as a whole to the Bishop.

The raucous events had not come to an end. It is at this juncture that a few most colorful bits of historical anecdote present themselves in the saga of turmoil at the College. The Reverend Jacob Rowe and his companion, the Welsh poet Reverend Goronwy Owen, gained a reputation as quite unsavory characters. It is

¹¹⁸ Morpurgo, *Their Majesties' Royall Colledge*, 121

¹¹⁹ An Address of the clergy of Virginia to the King, signed by John Camm as agent for the convention. Undated, but enclosed with letter from May, 1759. Fulham Papers, XIII:246

worth restating the irony of the situation here, that the very same two clergymen under concern in the following passage were hired to replace masters the Visitors had deemed rebellious enough to be fired:

Mr. Rowe, one of the Professors of Philosophy and Mr. Owen Professor of Humanity, have been often seen scandalously drunk, in College, and in the public Streets of Williamsburgh and York. That the said Mr. Rowe and Mr. Owen frequently utter horrid Oaths and Execrations in their common Conversation - by which Practices the Youth are liable to be corrupted, and the Influence and Authority of the Masters in directing the Scholars in their Moral Duty, quite destroyed.¹²⁰

Though some accountability for the destruction of the influence and authority of the professors must of course be assigned more generously to include their predecessors, this scandalous pair certainly pushed professorial rebelliousness to a new level. The charge against Rowe continued:

That the said Mr. Rowe, by a contentious, turbulent, contumacious, and a strange Madness of Behaviour has frequently endeavoured to destroy the regular authority of the President of the College, and to create and keep up Differences and Parties between the President and Masters.¹²¹

In answering his charges, Jacob Rowe confessed to occasional but not habitual drunkenness in with friends and to cursing in a fit of unchecked anger, but denied the last charge of conspiratorial designs against Thomas Dawson. The Visitors called Dawson who produced a letter written to him by Rowe, which, along with some

120 Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, April 26, 1760.

Fulham Papers, XIII: 284

121 Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, April 26, 1760.

Fulham Papers, XIII: 285

other unspecified testimony, they considered proof of the charge. The Visitors had clearly outlined the case beforehand.

Three days later, the Visitors summoned Rowe and delivered a harsh admonishment just over four pages long. They blasted his excuses one by one. On the matter of drinking too much because of his company, they forbade him from “following even a multitude to do Evil,” and his habit of swearing, they found “ridiculous” and “sinful.”¹²² Pertaining to the charge of his nasty treatment of Thomas Dawson, Rowe received another long rebuke:

You must know, Sir, or at least out to be convinced, that in this and every other Institution like it, 'tis necessary that a regular and due Subordination ought to be preserved and as the Professor or Masters have a Right to exact Obedience from the Students and Scholars, so is the President well entitled to a due Respect and Deference from the Professors and Masters: if these Rules are not strictly adhered to, the Affairs of the College must inevitably fall into the greatest Confusion, and of Course they must dwindle into nothing.¹²³

The Visitors were doing everything they could to help a defenseless Thomas Dawson. The scene was not unlike that classic image of an adult in authority admonishing a bully for the abuse of a defenseless child. Thomas Dawson must have been simultaneously embarrassed for his so obvious impotence, but meekly cheering on the Visitors' rescue.

122 Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, May 2, 1760. Fulham Papers, XIII: 286

123 Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, May 2, 1760. Fulham Papers, XIII: 286

Just a little while later that summer the “reverend” Rowe, and by one later account, possibly joined by Rev. Owen, went out the evening of August 14, 1760 and

did lately lead the boys out against the town apprentices to a pitched battle with pistols and other weapons, instead of restraining them and keeping them in, as was the duty of his office to have done: That at the same time he also insulted Mr. John Campbell by presenting a pistol to his Breast and also Peyton Randolph, Esqr., one of the Visitors, who was interposing as a magistrate and endeavoring to disperse the Combatants: That the next day he also insulted the President for enquiring of the Boys the Particulars of the Affair without a Convention of the Masters: And upon the Rector’s sending to him to take Care to keep the boys in that Night upon Apprehension of a second affray, he also grossly insulted him.¹²⁴

Thomas Dawson never really had control of the faculty, but with these men so out of control, he had rendered his office meaningless. The Visitors immediately dismissed Rowe, and forced Goronwy Owen out as well. Fauquier had sent his intellectual colleague Owen off to be the minister of St. Andrew’s Parish so he could get away from the Visitors.¹²⁵ Bitterness and disarray had little company left at the College.

124 Meeting of the Visitors and Governors of William and Mary College, August 14, 1760. Fulham Papers, XIII: 287. J.E. Morpurgo quotes a former student of Owen’s who claimed some forty years later that Rowe *and* Owen “headed he Collegians in, a fray which they had with the young men of the town.” The historian’s footnote leads only to John Gwilym Jones’ 1969 lecture entitled “Goronwy Owen’s Virginia Adventure,” which does not contain any such reference. Morpurgo, *Their Majesties’ Royall Colledge*, 124, fn 85.

125 Hockman, Daniel Mack. *The Dawson Brothers and the Virginia Commissariat, 1743-1760*

VIII. “A Fit Instrument for Designing Men”

Meanwhile, Camm had returned from London about three months prior to the end of Jacob Rowe, eager to rub his personal victory in the face of the colony’s royal representative. Camm had requested in writing that the Privy Council pronounce the laws to which he referred as “intolerable grievances” in the letters he authored on behalf of the General Convention of the Clergy in Virginia, “null and void in the Original Creation and had no Force or Authority at the Time of Making the Same.”¹²⁶ Having won it, he presented the order, at the end of June 1760, along with the sting of an official, royal “reprimand” for the governor’s backing of the Act, to Fauquier.¹²⁷ The governor was, according to Thad Tate, “enraged, believing that Camm had misrepresented him in London.... Calling in his servants and slaves, and pointing to Camm, the governor ordered that he would never be admitted to the Palace again.”¹²⁸ It appears that the pledge of “unquestioning patronage” of the clergy in Fauquier’s ceremonial welcome address had been forgotten.

When Camm requested again to hold a convention to update the clergy on his work as their representative in London, Dawson faltered once more. It was a familiar scene on which William Robinson zeroed in as he pointed to the Commissary as the source of this additional failure of inaction that had brought about the Clergy’s “deplorable situation” in Virginia:

In perils from without, and I wish I had not cause to say in perils from a false
 Brother. I mean our Commissary, Mr. Dawson. Had he acted as becomes the

126 John Camm to Privy Council, August 3, 1760. Fulham Papers, XIII, 282-284

127 He would in fact become College President in 1771, but was removed as a Tory in 1777.

128 Tate, *The College of William and Mary: A History*, I: 97

Bishop's Commissary, I am well persuaded none of these disorders would have happened, but my Lord, he is a meer Tool. His dependance is so great on the College, being president and *great ones here* being Visitors, that they make him act as they please not only as president, but as Commissary too.¹²⁹

He continued with his merciless exposé of Dawson in the final portion of a letter that turned out to contain a most damning description of Thomas Dawson:

This, together with their intention of altering the Tobacco Law in prejudice of the Clergy, certainly calls aloud for a convention; but we have not the least intimation of these things from our Commissary. He is afraid! For Why? Ill tell you, my Lord, He is a very immoral man. At a late Visitation of the College, he was accused, by two of the Visitors, of being a drunkard, of going to his parish Church in Williamsburgh drunk. I have seen him intoxicated by 9 o'clock in the morning as to be incapable of doing business, he was likewise accused of seldom or ever attending College Prayers, of being much addicted to playing Cards, and that in public Houses. All these accusations he was obliged to acknowledge to be true, there being witnesses ready to prove them. The Visitors insisted on making these acknowledgments in writing and giving them at the same time and in the same manner, the strongest assurances of his future good behaviour, which he accordingly did, and was continued president. But I am credibly informed he goes on in the old way. He is as Bishop's Commissary, of his Majesty's Council and consequently one of the Judges of the Supreme Court here. I have been told, by one who has the Honor to set on the same Bench, that he frequently falls asleep on the Bench, which he attributes to the effects of Liquor. In short he is despised by all, and I believe is continued president only as a fit instrument for designing men. His

129 William Robinson to the Bishop of London, November 20, 1760. Perry, Vol. I, 468

presidentship being £200 per annum, but liable to be deprived of it when the Visitors please, makes him afraid to act as Commissary.¹³⁰

It would be easy to discount such testimony by assuming that Robinson must have felt the motivation of personal interests to slander his fellow minister, but he goes out of his way to dispel the thought:

I do not say these things out of spite, envy, or malice to any one. I bless God, I have an Independent, tho' not a large Fortune. I desire no other Title or preferment than what I am already possessed of, viz. a parish priest of of the Church of England; and as such, I cannot stand still, and behold such a piece of Treachery as this without complaint; and the reason of my making it to you, my Lord, is in hopes you will communicate it to my Lord of London our most worthy Diocesan ... and by so doing ... you will be in some measure the Instrument of supporting the failing state of the Church of England in Virginia.¹³¹

William Robinson's insights once more provide a telling picture of Thomas Dawson, but the repetition of his emphasis on the reasons behind Dawson's tenure is particularly valuable. His account of the same proceeding mentioned above appeared in a letter some five years later, after he had taken over the late Dawson's position as Commissary:

My Predecessor in Office remarkable poor Man, for nothing more than compliance was by the Interest and Friendship of Governours raised to be both Commissary and President of the College and one of his Majesty's Council, and before he died he was at a Meeting of the Visitors of the college and in my presence accused of habitual Drunkenness, when to avoid the disagreeable proof he confessed the fact, and had the honour to have an apology made for him by the present Governour,

¹³⁰ William Robinson to the Bishop of London, November 20, 1760. Perry, Vol. I, 469

¹³¹ William Robinson to the Bishop of London, November 20, 1760. Perry, Vol. I, 469-470

which was to this effect: That the Person accused was a great object of compassion, in as much as he had been teased by a contrariety of opinions between him and the Clergy into the loss of his Spirits, and it was no wonder that he should apply for consolation to spirituous Liquors; which prevailed with the Visitation to grant a pardon on promise of future sobriety.¹³²

Gov. Fauquier must be commended for his witty defense of the “remarkable poor man,” but jokes could not repair a reputation of weakness, or supplement a legacy of inaction. Dawson had managed to stay in his offices by avoiding all confrontation. He wavered and waited his way through every sticky situation. All three of the governors he had dealt with in his professional life had at one time or another expressed their specific approval of him.¹³³ This was not because he demonstrated any excellent qualities as an administrator, because he surely did not. Virginia’s gentlemen in power saw in Thomas Dawson a tragically meek but honest preacher about whom they knew they would never have to worry.

Dawson revealed some of his own most personal sentiments in a letter he wrote to Lady Rebecca Gooch, whose husband, Dinwiddie’s predecessor as Governor, had been friends with Thomas. Even from the layman’s perspective, Dawson seems to have been quite depressed. His first hope for his son should surely soften anyone’s opinion of the man. Through its painful honesty, Dawson’s third person description of himself provides a poignant look at this tragic figure:

132 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, August 12, 1765. Fulham Papers XIV: 69.

133 Gov. Dinwiddie to to Bishop of London, July 28, 1752. Fulham Papers, XIII:79. Gov. Dinwiddie recommended Thomas Dawson for the Commissariat, “who was greatly esteem[e]d, by my Predecess[o]r Sr: William Gooch.”

And now I have mentioned my wife, I must give you some Account of my own Family; tho the bearer, to whom I refer you for news, knows none better, nor favored none more with her company, First then, as to ... Beck at present is a little big bellied girl, but will in Time I hope be a buxom Lass. Tom a very little Boy, like an Ancient of that Name in Miniature, but I hope he will soon outstrip him and meet with none of his most terrible Misfortunes. And as to the head of the house he has heretofore sometimes been sick & som[e]times well, sometimes chearful & sometimes sad, but in all States & Conditions of Life, he and the whole Family have the greatest esteem and Veneration for Lady Gooch, and are entirely at her Devotion. My Wife joins me in wishing Your Ladyship at this Season of Life all the temporal Advantages of Religion to which you are so justly entitled and the Eternal Reward of it, when Times shall be no more.¹³⁴

Nine days after Camm had written the Bishop recounting his altercation with Gov. Fauquier, Dawson's time was "no more." The scholarly governor proved to be a most perceptive judge of the ill-fated minister and academic. Fauquier composed an honest obituary for Dawson, printed in the Maryland Gazette January 8th, 1761, over a month after his death on November 29, 1760:

On Saturday last died the Honourable and Rev. Thomas Dawson, one of his Majesty's Honourable Council, Commissary for the Lord Bishop of London, president of the College of William and Mary and minister of Bruton Parish, a man eminently adorned with Moderation, Meekness, Forgiveness, Patience and Long-suffering and a most extensive and unlimited Benevolence and Charity. These Virtues rendered him beloved by his friends in his Life and regretted in his death, and if it be possible for these great qualifications to be carried to an excess that may

¹³⁴ Thomas Dawson to Lady Gooch, January 4, 1758. I copied this from Thomas' draft photostat in the Dawson Papers at Swem Library's Special Collections, but it was also published in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd Ser., Vol. 1, No. 1. (January, 1921), pp. 52-53.

be said to be the error of his life. Yet this amiable Disposition, this noble Life of truly Christian Talents could not secure him from the attacks of his Enemies, for it is much to be feared he fell a Victim to the repeated marks of Ingratitude and Malice, which he, unhappy man, too frequently experienced in his Passage through his state of Probation.¹³⁵

Dawson's sorrowful term as president was one of the worst in the College's history. He commanded no authority over his faculty and possessed weakness at a time when the office demanded strength. Fauquier's evaluation of Dawson's faults was apt. Though they appeared in a source most traditionally and understandably prone to flattery, these words spoke the truth. Fortunately for Dawson's sad legacy, they bade a kind farewell to a man who had attempted to serve in a position for which he was quite simply unsuited.

While one might reasonably debate the accuracy of eulogistic praise, other doubts as to Dawson's nature are far more difficult to doubt. Daniel Mack Hockman's 1975 dissertation, entitled "The Dawson Brothers and the Virginia Commissariat 1743-1760," purports to find among other things, that Thomas Dawson's lack of success was due to a matter of misfortune, and that Thomas was "more aggressive than his brother." While this work does not claim to constitute an equally focused comparison of the brothers as Mockman's, it has shown to an extent that Dawson's legacy is due as much or more to his own personal failings than to the fact that he was stuck with a Bishop who never sent him his paperwork. To say that the lack of his commission "prevented him from responding swiftly and decisively to

135 William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, Vol. 6, No. 4. (Apr., 1898), p. 216

events,” is merely to repeat the same excuse of which Dawson was so fond.¹³⁶

Hockman dwells on Thomas’s single major success, the organization of a charity for widows and orphans of clergy, and what he sees as Thomas’s ambitions, as proof of some moderate success achieved by the younger Dawson. While the charity was extremely successful in the long run, it was of a narrow focus with little to no impact on the College or the colony. In all, had any number of successful historical figures fallen such easy victims to misfortune, there would be many fewer books on shelves.

* * *

While the College endured formidable challenges after Thomas Dawson, the brief period over which he presided and just following forced the institution through a demanding gauntlet. Though the Visitors emerged from the fray gripping the authority to hire and fire faculty, the net result of the struggle was more akin to a modernization than a victory or a loss. Surviving the forge of internal dispute enhanced the College’s hardiness, just as rebuilding did following fire.

William Robinson had a particularly interesting perspective: along with Dawson, he was the only minister to sit on the Board of Visitors throughout this period of controversy, but unlike Dawson, he was not a professor. In a letter around 1761, just after Thomas Dawson’s death, Robinson provided the Bishop of London with as much information concerning the College and the Visitors as he thought necessary for an excellent understanding of the affairs of the College. Though he was one of their number, Robinson writes of the Visitors that his presence at the meetings was hardly needed: “I had little else to do than observe their conduct, having soon

¹³⁶ Hockman, 177

found that any opposition of mine to their measures was of no consequence and being refus[e]d the liberty of entering my dissent on any occasion.”¹³⁷

He reviewed the College’s original purpose, as a preparatory institution for holy orders, and found that, “This plain and fundamental design of the College the Visitors appear not to mean ever to keep long in their View.”¹³⁸ He emphasized how the Visitors had all agreed on one occasion that “there was no occasion for a Divinity Master,” even though the Charter required two: “To make this part of their conduct the more gross, they Desire that all the other Professors may be Laymen.” His letter continued to cover many items established by the Charter which the Visitors blatantly disregarded: “There were four Clergymen among the original Visitors; and it has been a rule till now, when one of them died to choose another Clergyman in his room, that the same number might continually be preserv[e]d.” The Visitors began to forgo this tradition.

Robinson saw the College’s secular body of leadership as sliding down a slippery slope via their disregard for the charter. The document established that the Visitors’ annual meeting should occur on a particular Monday, but that because they thought “one Day, as they phrase it, is as good as another,” they “often omitted, designedly, to meet on the Day appointed.”¹³⁹ They likewise claimed final say in

137 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 285

138 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 287

139 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 290

matters of punishment of students, positing that following two reprimands from a master, the offending student should be brought before the *Visitors* for trial.

Robinson saw clearly that the Visitors were consistently seizing different strands of authority, not limited to discipline, in a specific case wherein they required

that the Master of the Grammar School shall give them from time to time a Catalogue of the Books which the Boys of this School have read. That the Masters may have as little to do with rewarding as with punishing, the Visitors have taken the Election into Scholarships intirely to themselves.¹⁴⁰

This particular move pertaining to the awarding of scholarships provided evidence for certainly the most shameless example of this wresting of power:

they have shewn what little attention they pay to the aconomy and good success of the College. For when they altered the Statute in this point, they chang'd only the terms President and Masters into the terms Visitors, and did not take the trouble to consider the other Statutes, which depended on and lead to this capitol one. By which means ... there is this remarkable inconsistency, that the President and Masters are to examine strictly the candidates for Scholarships, and pay a regard to their poverty, behaviour, and progress in Learning, and then after all, the Visitors are to elect, which they constantly do, without ever consulting the Masters at all in the Matter, or paying any regard to the indigence, conduct and acquisitions of the Candidates.¹⁴¹

140 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 290

141 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 290-291

Changing a single word to snatch power perfectly illustrated the arbitrariness that Camm and his fellow faculty complained of so vociferously when they looked at the Visitors' tact.

The Visitors' meddling even spilled into specific academic subjects, some for which they quite frankly had no use; they had no problem telling Robinson this on one occasion:

“I was employed by Mr. Rowe to deliver to the Visitors from him a proposal for them to empower him to carry the Students thro[ugh] a course of Logick, this but a part of what is directed in the Statutes.” One of the visitors, to the approval of the others declared that “Logick was good for nothing but to teach people to quibble.”¹⁴²

One of the other subject-related opinions that the Visitors held, Robinson also held in disdain. It seems that the Board had come up with a radical notion that the tradition of sending each student down the same path of study might be improved. After completing their course in the Grammar School, students had the option to “attend but one of the Professor, and which of them they please.”¹⁴³ Robinson saw this as merely a “liberty which commonly ends in their doing little or nothing after their attendance on the Grammar School is over,” but little did he know how many people would eventually adhere to such a plan of study, or admittedly in some cases, his forecast of little or no study.

142 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 288-9

143 William Robinson to Bishop Sherlock, undated, but probably 1761. Fulham Papers, XIV: 291

That the Visitors saw a need for the choice of one's academic path concurs with the very attitude of personal independence their changes embodied. As men of wealth and often learning, the members of the Board looked at the College as an institution of great value to them. It was a place for the development and refinement of more men like them. The clerical faculty, while willing to allow secular study, wanted to ensure that the college's seminarian aspect was preserved, free from the incursions of secular gentlemen who had no use for such programs.¹⁴⁴ This refined picture of the nature of the clash over control of the College illuminate valuable nuances.

IX. "A Sad Truth"

Dudley Digges summarized the sad state of William and Mary in 1767:

We wish my Lord, most ardently wish, that we could upon good Grounds inform your Lordship, that our College is at this Time in a flourishing State; we much fear the Reverse is the Case. The Education of our Youth has been strangely neglected; instead of improving their Morals, and [illegible] in virtuous Principles at the College, it is to be lamented, as a sad Truth, that both have here often been corrupted for Want of a strict Attention to their Behaviour; hence, as might be

144 The Clergy of Virginia to the Bishop of London, February 25, 1756. Perry, I:440. Several members of the clergy signed this petition which addressed the Two Penny Act in the years of lull between 1755 and 1758. It contained a statement revealing what might be seen as a liberal opinion of the College's educational function, namely, that aside from preparing "some" for the ministry, the College also served the "youth, who are educated in several useful branches of learning."

expected a vast Diminution of the Number of Scholars.... [S]urely it is high time for us to ... endeavour to apply proper Remedies. ¹⁴⁵

Digges had seen the chaos of the Dawson days, as well as a few more years of bothersome but less ridiculous troubles. The remedies eventually found their way to the William and Mary, though the Revolution and then the Civil War prevented the College from truly blossoming again until much later. But when the College fell, badly bruised but still intact, from Dawson's incapable hands, a modernization of sorts had occurred, or at least had begun. The door to an era of balanced power between a less clerical faculty and a more interested Board of Visitors had been opened by unpleasant forces.

* * *

On the 313th anniversary of the College's royal charter, William and Mary invited Virginia's Governor to deliver a celebratory address. Of course, Governor Timothy Kaine uttered Thomas Jefferson's name five times, amidst references to the history of the College as "America's story." But more important than the routine acknowledgements was a parallel that the recently elected head of the Commonwealth drew connecting the College's new President, Gene Nichol, to the one and only Thomas Dawson, who served as nothing more than the butt of a joke: "I pray that President Nichol has a better tenure than President Thomas Dawson, who led this institution when young Thomas Jefferson arrived as a student. President Dawson was arraigned before the Board of Visitors for habitual drunkenness." The Governor recounted Fauquier's witty defense of Dawson and then closed the

145 Dudley Digges to Bishop Terrick, July 15, 1767. Fulham Papers, XIV:125

reference with a hopeful sentiment: “President Nichol, no doubt you will have occasional contrariety in this position, but you will be a great president for this college. Virginians are lucky to have you and I am excited to work together.”¹⁴⁶ While the perspective of a historian served Gov. Kaine in the short term as a rhetorical device, it also proved relevant in the long term. The Board of Visitors arbitrarily seized the authority to hire and fire College faculty during Thomas Dawson’s tenure. Dawson’s inaction in the face of direct challenges to his authority and encroachment upon his office becomes ironically powerful when one understands how it led to practical challenges for his successors, even hundreds of years into the future.

146 Gov. Timothy Kaine’s Charter Day Address to the College of William and Mary, February 11, 2006

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