# A CALENDAR OF THE LETTERS OF CHARLES THOMSON

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with a calendar of the published letters of Charles Thomson, an American colonial political figure, whose most significant position was secretary of the Continental Congresses. Though studies of Thomson are becoming more frequent, no one has collected his letters in one volume, a step which is fundamental to any complete study of the man.

The importance of Charles Thomson as a colonial leader is becoming more clear with recent research. He began his political career as a participant in an Indian conference in western Pennsylvania.[1] With the Stamp Act crisis, Thomson assumed a larger role in colonial affairs, especially as a correspondent with Pennsylvania's London agent, Benjamin Franklin, for Franklin depended upon Thomson for an accurate pulse of colonial feeling, and Thomson looked to Franklin for aid in marshalling support for the colonial cause.[2] Being a merchant, Thomson entered into the commercial agreements among the colonials in protest to parliamentary action and became a key figure in maintaining the cooperation of Philadelphia merchants in such agreements.[3] As

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[1] Items 1 and 2, Chapter V, pp. 91-2.

[2] Items 1, 3, and 4, Chapter III, pp. 10-11, 14-18.

[3] Item 2, Chapter III, pp. 11-14, and item 6, Chapter V, pp. 94-5.

relations with Great Britain became more strained, Thomson was a central figure in steering Pennsylvania out of the moderates' hands and into the "cause of America."[4] The apex of his political career was reached when he became the secretary of the Continental Congresses for a period of fifteen years (1774-1789), before finally rendering his resignation, though reluctantly, to President Washington.[5]

As a calendar of Charles Thomson's letters this one is not complete, for attention has been given only to those already published in part or in whole. Some of his letters remain as unpublished manuscripts. This study is further confined to letters that are strictly those of Charles Thomson; i.e., many letters have been published that were written by the Secretary of Congress and contain only what Congress had instructed the Secretary to write; these are omitted for they cast no light on the person of Charles Thomson.[6]

Although sources are not abundant for Thomson's letters,[7] several have been consulted which yielded many letters. The

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[4]Items 31 and 42, Chapter III, pp. 51-2, 69.

[5]Item 39, Chapter III, pp. 66-7.

[6]These "business letters" may be found in Edmund C. Burnett, ed., Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, 8 vols., Washington, 1921-1936; hereafter cited as Burnett, Letters.

[7]Thomson, late in his life, destroyed many of his private papers. (Lewis Reifsneider Harley, The Life of Charles Thomson, Philadelphia, 1900, p. 7; hereafter cited as Harley, Life.)

best-known available source is in the Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1878, a volume which deals with letters and papers of the American Revolutionary War leaders and contains many unedited Thomson letters. Another valuable source, particularly for the period of the Congresses, is Edmund C. Burnett's edition of the Letters of the Members of the Continental Congress; the letters in this eight-volume series are heavily footnoted, which adds valuable light at many points. The only biography in book form is that of Lewis Reifsneider Harley, The Life of Charles Thomson, published in 1900. Although it, of course, does not reflect the latest research, it does contain a few letters in their entirety and many extracts, most of which, though, are not documented and must be identified by other sources. Further research produced letters from the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, the first series of the Pennsylvania Archives, Verner W. Crane's edition of Benjamin Franklin's Letters to the Press 1758-1775, Albert Smyth's collection of The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, Julian Boyd's edition of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, and Francis Wharton's collection of The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, each of which yielded one or two letters.

In addition to the biography of Thomson by Lewis R. Harley, a more recent, valuable study has been done by John J. Zimmerman, and may be found in The Mississippi Valley Historical Review for December, 1958. This excellent, short article is especially

valuable for the study of the political acumen Thomson evinced in Philadelphia, and aptly demonstrates that the title Thomson was once given, "the Sam Adams of Philadelphia," was no misnomer. The sketch of Thomson in the Dictionary of American Biography, written by Edmund C. Burnett, provides little detail.

The method of handling the letters in this study needs some explanation. No attempt has been made to reproduce the letters from the various sources listed above; rather, the letters have been summarized with the intent that the content of each letter would be bared without the verbosity that often accompanied letters of that period. But in order that some of the style and personality of Charles Thomson may be seen, many quotations have been included. What emerges, then, from a study of this type is a calendar of letters rather than a collection of printed letters.

The second chapter of this work is a brief biography of Thomson, noting especially details in his life that will illuminate many of the letters which follow. The letters themselves have been divided into three sections and lend themselves very readily to such a division. Though there is, of course, some overlapping from one section to another, it is hoped that adequate footnotes will guide the reader to letters of a similar content but included in another section. The bulk of the letters are found in Chapter III which deals with the American Revolutionary War, as well as the events and crises that led to the

war. Chapter IV contains letters that reflect Thomson's interests outside his vocation, his scientific, religious, and philosophical bents. Then his vocational (other than Congress) and strictly personal letters are gathered in Chapter V. In this last section will be found those letters that deal with his role in Indian affairs, his commercial business in Philadelphia, and his personal letters to his close friends.

## CHAPTER II

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Charles Thomson, born November 29, 1729, in Gortede, County Derry, Ireland, migrated with his father and four brothers and a sister, to America in 1739. Following the unexpected death of his widower father, Charles lived for a time with a blacksmith near New Castle, Delaware, but ran away when he overheard plans to have him apprenticed in the blacksmith trade. On his flight to Wilmington he was befriended by an unknown lady and soon became a student at Dr. Francis Alison's academy at New London, Pennsylvania. Studying under so fine a scholar soon stimulated Thomson's intellectual capabilities, and he developed a zeal for knowledge and a keen understanding of languages.[1]

Immediately following his own education, Thomson entered the teaching field. One of his earliest teaching appointments was secured by a new friend, Benjamin Franklin, who, as President of the Board of Trustees of the Philadelphia Academy (later to become the University of Pennsylvania), used his influence to obtain the position for Thomson. During his years of teaching, which concluded in 1760, Thomson met other influential persons and served the colony of Pennsylvania as well.

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[1]Material for this sketch was chiefly gleaned from Harley, Life, and John J. Zimmerman, "Charles Thomson, 'The Sam Adams of Philadelphia'," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review (December, 1958), XLV, pp. 464-480; hereafter cited as Zimmerman, "Thomson."

Thomson's skill as a penman was noticed, and subsequently was utilized in a conference in 1756 between the Penn government and the Indians. The Quakers, who had brought Thomson to the conference, were intervening in order to restore peace within the colony. This dispute was followed by another a year later at which time Thomson was chosen to serve as secretary for the Delaware chief, Teedyuscung; Thomson continued, as his letters indicate, to serve in this capacity beyond the actual conferences. This experience in Indian affairs proved to be Thomson's apprenticeship in politics, and he soon assumed a more important role in Pennsylvania politics.

Following the termination of his educational work, in 1760, Thomson entered the commercial world as a successful importer in Philadelphia. During his years as a merchant, he played a key role as a strong supporter of colonial rights. With Franklin in London as a colonial agent for Pennsylvania, correspondence between the two of them played a major role in the Stamp Act crisis, each publishing some of the other's letters on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

The Townshend Duties provided an opportunity for Thomson the businessman to lead in establishing the non-importation agreement in Philadelphia. Failure for two years to effect such an agreement did not deter Thomson; and finally, in early 1769, he saw his labors rewarded with such a compact among the Philadelphia merchants. By spring, 1770, interest among the

merchants of the city was beginning to wane, and a key letter from Franklin enabled Thomson and others to retain the agreement in Philadelphia. Yet by July, 1770, the conservative forces had become sufficiently strong to rescind the agreement and import British commodities except tea.

This defeat for the radicals was not a permanent one, however, and the radicals used the lull (1770-1773) to secure their forces. The next significant event in which Thomson played a major role was in the reaction to the Boston Port Bill in the spring of 1774. Two important letters of Thomson (to David Ramsay and William Drayton)[2] contain details of the radicals' battle to contain the conservatives in Pennsylvania and at the same time bring Pennsylvania, as a united colony, in line with the "American cause." This same year marks the beginning of a successful position for Thomson as secretary of the Continental Congresses, a position he held until he submitted his resignation to President George Washington, in 1789. Though the opportunity seemed available for him to continue in this capacity[3] he retired to private life.

To present only the political achievements of Thomson is not to present a balanced picture of the man, for his interests ranged far beyond the political arena. His letters reflect a

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[2]Items 31 and 42, Chapter III, pp. 51-2, 69.

[3]Item 36, Chapter III, pp. 63-4.

long and enjoyable friendship with Thomas Jefferson during the course of which the two men exchanged much correspondence about scientific interests both shared. Being an elder in the Presbyterian church, Thomson found time to pursue religious interests gained while a student in Dr. Alison's academy. In later life Thomson utilized his skill in languages in completing a translation of the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. His interest in philosophy was also expressed in his letters.

As his middle years stretched into old age, Thomson suffered the maladies of that part of life, but he was an exceptionally hardy individual and survived two strokes to reach eventually the age of ninety-five. Though his death on August 16, 1824, prevented him from attaining the century mark he often felt he would reach, his life had still spanned one of the most important periods in the history of the United States.

# CHAPTER III

## THE CRISES YEARS: 1765-1789

### A. PRE-WAR YEARS: 1765-1773

1

(From Verner Winslow Crane, ed., Benjamin Franklin's Letters to the Press 1758-1775, Chapel Hill, 1950, pp. 36-38.) Philadelphia, September 24, 1765. To Benjamin Franklin, London.

Franklin had written his now-famous letter of July 11, 1765, to his "Friend in America,"[1] in explanation of the passing of the Stamp Act. Even though everything was done to prevent the passage of the hated measure, the "tide was too strong against /the colonists/." Thomson replied, agreeing with Franklin that "Idleness and Pride tax with a heavier hand than Kings and Parliaments," and that "Frugality and Industry will go a great way towards indemnifying /the colonists/," but yet contended that "the very thing that renders industry necessary cuts the sinews of it," for who would "labour or save who has not a security in his property?" When people are taxed by their own representatives, they submit and pay the tax cheerfully; but when taxes are levied by caprice and only to settle a constitutional issue, "what encouragement is there to labour or save?" Thomson could not wonder that "people will chuse to live poor and lazy rather than labour to enrich their tax-masters, or furnish matter for new oppression."

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[1]Thomson is identified as the "Friend" on page 36.

Thomson went even further by declaring that liberty was disappearing in the colonies, not just because of the problem of taxation and property, but because more essential privileges were in danger:

> Arbitrary courts are set over us, and trials by juries taken away: The Press is so restricted that we cannot complain: An army of mercenaries threatened to be billeted on us: The sources of our trade stopped; and, to compleat our ruin, the little property we had acquired, taken from us, without even allowing us the merit of giving it; I really dread the consequence. The parliament insist on a power over all the liberties and privileges claimed by the colonies, and hence require a blind obedience and acquiscence in whatever they do: Should the behaviour of the colonies happen not to square with these sovereign notions, (as I much fear it will not) what remains but by violence to compel them to obedience. Violence will beget resentment, and provoke to acts never dreamt of: But I will not anticipate evil; I pray God avert it.

Thomson then congratulated Franklin on the change in the British ministry /from George Grenville to the Marquess of Rockingham/; the colonists anticipated "much good" from this change.

2

(From Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1878, New York, 1879, pp. 7-12; hereafter cited as Collections. An extract of this letter may be found in Harley, Life, p. 66.) Philadelphia, November 9, 1765. To Messrs. Cook, Lawrence and Company /London/.

Thomson enclosed a note for £ 260 of J. Carson drawn on David Harvey, which Thomson wanted credited to his account.

Finding that the ship that was to carry this letter was not to sail for a time, Thomson used the occasion to comment

extensively on the confusion and crisis created by the Stamp Act. His list of difficulties created by the Act included closing of the courts and government offices; moving of debtors to escape their creditors; closing of ports; credit gone with trade and commerce at a stand still; non-importation effected by the colonial merchants (Thomson included the countermanding order[2]).

Thomson summarized the colonial feeling towards the Act and the unfortunate results. The colonial trade "of late years" had been restricted by measures enacted by both parliament and ministry of Great Britain. This was an especially acute problem since the colonies were so well-endowed by nature for trade and manufacturing: fish, minerals, foodstuffs, furs, and similar natural resources were found in abundance in America. The actual restrictions listed by Thomson included the restricting of iron manufacturing (iron ore could be converted to bars only--no mills were allowed), woolen restriction, and the hat act. These restrictions forced the colonials to get their manufactured goods from England and to send their produce to the West Indies where the prices fell because of an over-supply. The Middle Colonies thus sold to the Spanish, and the New England colonies sold fish to the French in return for French molasses. The profits from this trading went to England to pay for imported goods. Then, when England closed the neutral

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[2]Item 6, Chapter V, pp. 94-5.

ports, which prohibited commercial intercourse with Spain and France, Thomson complained that

> The Price of our Produce is reduced, and our trade is crampt, the Channels thro which we derived specie entirely stopped, so that we cannot import those Quantities of B. Manufacturers as we used to do, nor even pay for what we have got--and for my own part I do not see what remains for us but to break off our intercourse with G.B. and apply ourselves to trade & handcrafts in order to supply our wants and necessities.

Furthermore, the colonies were deprived of paper currency by the Currency Acts of 1751 and 1764, imports from the West Indies (already raised in prices) were loaded with duties, and monstrous taxes were imposed on the colonies without their consent and enforced by ways unknown in either the colonies or in Great Britain. The colonies were also burdened with the support of a standing army even though the French threat to the colonies was gone, and were harassed by the liberal use of writs by the English officers in the colonies.

> Thus /Thomson concludes/ a Colonist in the future has no security in his property, no Protection in his house, no Right to a Trial by a Jury in matters relating to the Stamp Act, or any other act of Trade, but is liable to be dragged, at the pleasure of any Infamous informer a thousand miles from home and subjected to the will of an Arbitrary Judge of a Court of Admiralty.

Thomson thought that the results of this crisis would include loss of the loyalty of two million subjects and the raising of jealousies that would take years to efface. Already American manufacturing had been stimulated rather than discouraged, a spirit of liberty had been awakened, the Stamp Act officers had been forced

to resign, lawful order had been suspended, and the colonies were united in opposition.

Thomson added a postscript that indicated he had missed the ship because of the length of the letter.

3

(From Collections, pp. 15-16.) No city given, May 20, 1766. To Benjamin Franklin /London/.

Thomson congratulated and thanked Benjamin Franklin for his part in the repeal of the Stamp Act. He took this occasion to describe the colonists during the crises:

> Determined in their own mind what part to act should matters come to extremities, the sensible and judicious waited the event with patience and temper, tho with much anxiety and distress of mind; while the turbulent and weaker spirits (of which there are but too many in every state) giving way to the sallies of their passions expressed their Resentment or Joy in acts which cannot be justifyed, tho they may be excused.

Thomson expressed the hope that the "justice and tenderness of England would make up for the unfortunate acts of a few," and he assured Franklin that the loyalty of the colonies was still unwavering towards Great Britain. He thus hoped for renewed ties between Great Britain and the colonies. "May there never arise a like occasion."

4

(From Collections, pp. 21-25; an extract of this letter is found in Harley, Life, pp. 67-68.) Philadelphia, November 26, 1769. To Benjamin Franklin /London/.

(The Townshend Duties [1767] had occasioned many grievances in the colonies, especially among the merchants, and Charles Thomson wrote to his friend, Benjamin Franklin, about the colonial feeling concerning this crisis.)

Thomson wanted Franklin to be acquainted with the colonial situation since Parliament would undoubtedly be considering American affairs. The Committee of Merchants (of Philadelphia) had instructed Thomson to send a letter to the Committee of Merchants in London. The Philadelphia and New York merchants had agreed to "confine their non-importation to the repeal of the act laying duties on Tea, Paper, Glass and Paints. . . ." But the merchants did not feel this act was the only one that was a danger to their liberty.

Thomson believed, therefore, that a partial redress of grievances would avail little, for the colonists could see that the ministry had a plan to "subjugate America to arbitrary power and that all the late acts respecting them [the colonists] lead to this purpose." Parliament claimed the right to tax the colonies without the consent of the colonists. Parliament had also suspended the legislative authority of an American assembly [New York] for not obeying the dictates of parliament. Furthermore, "to convince the Americans," Thomson goes on, "that no act of their legislatures, however solemnly passed and ratified can screen them from the power of Parliament, they by another act order a certain sum to be paid as a fee to one of the petty officers of the customs with these words annexed 'any law, by

law, or act of assembly in any of the colonies to the contrary notwithstanding.'" Parliament had empowered the king to create a Board of Commissioners with unlimited power in order to control the purse. To insure no interference from courts in the colonies, parliament extended jurisdiction of admiralty courts and gave the customs officers "and every informer" the option of taking suits relative to the revenue to the admiralty courts. Next, the army left in the colonies following the French and Indian war was publicly declared in the colonies to be there for the purpose of enforcing obedience to parliament. To add insult to injury, remonstrances and petitions of assemblies were treated as sedition. Then, too, an "antique and obsolete law was revived, and the Crown addressed to send for persons accused of treasonable practices in America & try them in England." The crux of the argument appeared when Thomson stated:

> It is true that impositions already laid are not very grievous but if the principle is established, and the Authority by which they are laid admitted, there is no security for what remains. The very nature of freedom supposes that no tax can be levied on a people without their consent given personally or by their representatives. It was not on account of the largeness of the sum demanded by Charles Ist that ship money was so odious to the commons of England. But because the principle upon which it was demanded left them nothing they could call their own.

The continuation of parliament's domination would be almost disastrous. A spirit of inquiry had already been awakened among the colonists with the results that the colonists had gained a fuller knowledge of their rights and of ways and means at their

disposal "for supplying their real wants." The colonists would start supplying all their material needs from their own soil and resources. Lastly, as more people became landowners, the spirit of liberty would be kept awake and the love of freedom would be more deeply rooted. Therefore, the ministry, by their "blind infatuation and madness of politics" were hastening what they /ministry/ dreaded /separation?/.

Thomson concluded with the hope that the British empire would spread and increase; however, he thought that the "folly of a weak administration has darkened the prospect." In the last analysis the result of this crisis would be left to Providence.

## B. PERIOD OF CONGRESSES: 1774-1789

### 4

(From Albert H. Smyth, ed., The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 10 vols., New York, 1906, V, pp. 282-83.) No city given, November 1, 1774. To Benjamin Franklin /London/.

In this letter Thomson forwarded an "Address to the King and an Address to the people of Great Britain & these colonies." He had also hoped to include the journal of the proceedings of the (First) Continental Congress, but it was still in the press. He hoped that this Address would help the British to see that it was not just a faction that was complaining and applying for redress, but it was rather "the whole body of American freeholders from Nova Scotia to Georgia" that was concerned and would "resist rather than submit." He concluded:

When I look back and consider the warm affection which the Colonies had for Great Britain till the present reign, the untainted loyalty, unshaken fidelty & cheerful confidence that universally prevailed, till that time, and then view the present heartburnings, jealousies, gloom & despair, I am ready to ask, with the poet, "Are there not some chosen thunders in the stores of heaven armed with uncommon wrath to blast those Men," who by their cursed schemes of policy are dragging friend & brothers into the horrors of civil War & involving their country in ruin.

Even yet the wound may be healed, & peace and love restored; but we are on the very edge of the precipice.

5

(From Burnett, Letters, IV, pp. 74-5.) Philadelphia, February 19, 1779. To Joseph Reed, governor of Pennsylvania.

A letter from Joseph Reed was read in Congress February 19, 1779, in which Reed referred to several cases; in this letter Thomson enclosed the proceedings of Congress in these matters.

Thomson pointed out that neither New Jersey nor her governor had lodged a complaint against General Maxwell; the charge was made by Abraham Clark, who was a delegate to Congress from New Jersey.[3]

The case of Lieutenant Colonel Carrington, Thomson related, was "of a delicate nature." Carrington had made such complete atonement for his offence (which offence was not mentioned in the letter) that Congress ordered that the part of the official journal

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[3]From John Fell's diary, a valuable source of detail on the proceedings of Congress, comes information that the complaint against General Maxwell was for refusing to deliver some prisoners detained by him who were demanded by a writ of habeas corpus. (Burnett, Letters, III, p. 553.)

that concerned Carrington's case should not be published. Thomson hoped that Reed would have no occasion to embarrass Carrington by revealing his deed.

Thomson closed by promising Reed any minutes of Congress which were not secret that Reed or the Pennsylvania Council might need.

6

(From Burnett, Letters, V, p. 94.) Philadelphia, March 23, 1780. To Jonathan Trumbull, governor of Connecticut.

Thomson had evidently asked Jonathan Trumbull for various state papers of Connecticut, for he thanked Trumbull for the papers Trumbull sent. Thomson wished to accumulate, in the Secretary of Congress' office, as many of the various states' papers as possible, so that each state could have access to other states' papers.

Thomson enclosed the Journal of Congress for February, 1780.

7

(From Collections, pp. 31-40; extracts are found in Harley, Life, pp. 102-104.) Philadelphia, October 12, 1780. To John Jay, United States Minister at Madrid, Spain.

Thomson, in answering a letter of May 27, 1780, from John Jay, wished to keep the American minister to Spain well informed of progress in the war.

One of the chief problems was that of finances, and Thomson realized it would be difficult to explain the colonial paper money system to Europeans, though he believed it should be done. Jay

might remember that before he left the United States, Congress had authorized 200 million dollars in paper money to be printed, and it would be redeemed "by annual assessment for eighteen years." Congress found it needed more money, so it called on the states to raise (altogether) fifteen million dollars per month. The state legislatures were slow in raising the necessary taxes to meet the need. When the people heard of the impending taxes, prices were raised in order to have money with which to pay them; consequently, the money depreciated, and when the assessments were paid, they were found to be inadequate, for in the meantime prices had doubled (by January, 1780, over October, 1779, when Jay had left). In February [1780] Congress called on the states for provisions instead of money, because the public debt had soared "almost beyond calculation." The Continental dollar was by now worth only "a penny half penny," and it took 90 Continental dollars to buy a dollars' worth of goods.

The enemy was not slow to take advantage of this situation; they counterfeited the American money to undermine its value further and prosecuted the war effort with increased vigor. The American army, however, rose to the occasion [though Thomson does not spell out any specifics about the army].

By March 18, 1780, Congress had a new financial plan ready. It called for: (1) call in, by taxes, and burn all of the 200 million dollars in paper money; (2) issue ten million dollars in paper money no faster than the old came in; and (3) for payment

of taxes, gold and silver would be received at the rate of one for forty, "at which rate also the new money was to be received. . . ." Congress did not stop here, but proceeded to fix

> the value of the Certificates given for money loaned from Sept. 1777, to March, 1780, rating the value of the continental money on every day between those two periods that the lender might receive the value of the money lent, both principal and Interest, and that the public might not be loaded with a debt for which they had not received an equivalent. For it was judged to be contrary to every rule of right and justice that the landed interest, which is the principal object of taxation should be loaded with the burden of paying off a Certificate for instance of 200 Dollars which was procured with the price of three bushels of wheat or a bushel of salt & sometimes for less, with that number of silver dollars, worth in reality from 60 to 100 times the value of the money lent. And yet this must have been the Case had Congress persisted in the mode of redemption adopted in 1779.

The success of these new measures was attested to by the fact that the states enacted laws conformable to the new regulations, that the war debt was kept at twenty-one or twenty-two million dollars (whereas it had cost Great Britain sixty million dollars by 1780), and that the ten million dollars was raised (six million of which went to the states and four million of which went to the army.)

But before these measures could be effected Congress needed money, and the method used might be difficult to explain in Europe: "that of drawing bills here." Thomson offered an apologetic, though, in comparing large countries, who were well established, and who often encountered shortages of money in war time, with America, which was a young nation, not well-established, with little money, but which was engaged successfully with one such powerful, well-established nation.

Thomson then showed how the lack of money had hindered and even lost campaigns, particularly in the Carolinas. The Carolinas were informed of the coming of /General Henry/ Clinton, but no funds were available with which to send help. /General Horatio/ Gates was sent to relieve /North/ Carolina, but the lack of supplies forced him back /at Camden, August 16, 1780/ even though his troops exhibited bravery in battle.

In the North, the arrival of the first division of the French fleet and army gave the Americans hope of re-capturing New York City, but the British foiled the plan. The French and Spanish fleet joined /no date given/ in the Caribbean and sailed for Jamaica but wasted time and allowed the British (under Walsingham) to reinforce the island. This reinforcement coupled with the hurricane season saved Jamaica for the British. The combined French and Spanish fleets now separated--the Spanish sailing for Havanna and the French heading for Cape Francois in St. Domingo. The French fleet (led by Count de Guichen) later left Cape Francois and headed along the American coast. This movement alarmed the British and they accordingly reinforced New York City.

The last incident of significance to be related to Jay in this letter was the unfolding of /Benedict/ Arnold's treason. Thomson asserted that Arnold was the first and only American officer to betray the United States. Considering the character of the man ("brave but avaricious," "fond of parade," unscrupulous about gaining money, but quick to lose it by extravagant living)

it was not difficult to understand his actions. His being court-martialed on complaint of "the Council of Pennsylvania" helped make him a good target for the British.[4]

Major Andre (aide-de-camp of Clinton) had correspondence with Mrs. Arnold supposedly about supplying her with millinery (in 1779). Thomson did not know whether this correspondence continued until the betrayal of West Point took place, but he did feel the scheme had been planned for some time, for reports were circulated by the British, while the British were planning to acquire West Point, that the plan was for Cornwallis and Sir /Henry/ Clinton to meet in Virginia.

> . . . at this time /Thomson states/ Rodney arrived at New York, and it is conjectured, the design was upon gaining possession of West Point and cutting off the communication between the Eastern and Southern States, to turn their whole force against the French fleet and Army at Rhode Island. This it is true is but conjecture. But it must be confessed the object was great; and had Rodney succeeded, he would have finished the year with as much eclat as he began it. The providential discovery of the Plot blasted the scheme of our enemies; what their next object will be time must unfold.

Current movements among the diplomats included /Henry/ Laurens going to Holland on his first diplomatic appointment, and

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[4]Arnold and the Council of Pennsylvania were always at odds; previous to Arnold's treason, the Council, in 1779, brought eight charges against Arnold. A court-martial considered the charges in December, 1779, and in January, 1780. The only action the court took was to recommend that Washington reprimand Arnold. See Willard M. Wallace, Traitorous Hero, New York, 1954, pp. 180-192.

the sending of Mr. /James/ Searle to Europe on a secret mission.[5] Thomson said he was "mistaken in the Character of the man if his business and mission remain long a secret after his arrival."

8

(From Collections, pp. 41-61.) Philadelphia, July 11, 1781. To John Jay, Madrid, Spain.

(Thomson wrote this lengthy letter to inform Jay of the military progress of the American Revolution.)

Gates' defeat on August 16 /1780/, at Camden left the enemy free to overrun South Carolina with the only resistence coming from local militias. Cornwallis was determined to break all resistence, and sent Major Ferguson to begin the operation. Ferguson met and engaged the Americans at King's Mountain, but the victory went to the Americans /October 7, 1780/, with 1,000 of the enemy killed and taken prisoners. This clash slowed Cornwallis' progress so he set out methodically to subdue the countryside, forcing the citizens to take an oath of allegiance to Great Britain.

/October 24, 1780/ Greene was sent to replace Gates. Now Cornwallis' object was the defeat of Greene, and he received his

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[5]Searle was a wealthy Philadelphia merchant who served in the Continental Congress from November, 1778, until July, 1780; he was chairman of the commercial committee whose duty was to apportion quotas of taxes to be paid by the states. Searle was sent in July, 1780, to Europe to negotiate a loan of £ 20,000 for the state of Pennsylvania; this is the mission Thomson mentioned. (James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, ed., Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography, V, New York, 1888, p. 447.)

first opportunity to do so at Cowpens /July 17, 1781/ where the Americans, numbering about 1,000 and led by /General Daniel/ Morgan and Colonel /Andrew/ Pickens defeated Cornwallis and Colonel /Banastre/ Tarleton. Thomson reported that "upwards of six hundred . . . prisoners" were taken by the Americans. Cornwallis then set out to expell the weakened, though victorious, Americans led by Morgan, but rain slowed Cornwallis' progress. When Greene heard about Morgan's predicament, he joined Morgan, but both had to retreat because of Cornwallis' greater numbers. The retreat ended in Virginia, Cornwallis having pursued the Americans over two hundred miles.

After resting on the Virginia border (at the Dan River), Cornwallis suddenly headed for Hillsborough (where Greene had sent his baggage before he joined Morgan), but encountered Greene at Guilford Courthouse /March 15, 1781/, where part of Greene's command had been previously sent. The English won a Pyrrhic victory that prevented any pursuit of the Americans. After a few days of rest, Greene set out after Cornwallis but could not engage him in battle; content to capture the sick and wounded which Cornwallis had left behind in his flight to Wilmington, Greene turned his attention to the relief of South Carolina.

Cornwallis had left /Lord/ Rawdon in South Carolina in charge of a small detachment that was supposed to check local militias. But such Americans as /Thomas/ Sumter and /Francis/ Marion, in spite of Rawdon, secured the lower part of South

Carolina and cooped up the British garrison in Charlestown. Greene marched to Camden, Rawdon's headquarters, but saw that his (Greene's) troops were insufficient to attack Rawdon. Greene then cut off the British supply line and forced the British to come out in battle where the British suffered heavy losses /April 25, 1781/. Confusion in the American ranks, however, forced Greene to retreat two miles. After setting fire to Camden, Rawdon retreated to Charlestown. This left most of South Carolina to Greene, and he proceeded to take everything in South Carolina except Charlestown; the Americans also controlled all of Georgia except Savannah (Lt. Col. /Light-horse Harry/ Lee having taken Augusta).

In the meantime, /General Alexander/ Leslie had been sent from New York to Chesapeake Bay to prevent Virginia from sending aid to the Carolinas. Greene was thus weakened in the south /for the latter part of 1780/ because he had to leave some troops under Baron Steuben for the defense of Virginia against Leslie's forces. Leslie was then sent on to South Carolina /he arrived at Charlestown on December 13, 1780/ to reinforce Cornwallis. Arnold arrived in Virginia /December 20, 1780/ with reinforcements to harass the country on both sides of the Shesapeake. After Arnold's defeat at Portsmouth /was really Richmond, January 3, 1781/ he ravaged the countryside. Thomson complained that Arnold "practiced a mode of warfare unknown in modern times and unpracticed by the civilized nations of Europe, robbing, plundering, and burning the

houses of the peaceful farmers." To stop Arnold, General Washington sent one thousand choice troops under Major General the Marquis de la Fayette. The French fleet, which was sent from Rhode Island to Chesapeake to co-operate with la Fayette, met the British fleet [March 16, 1781], and was forced to return to Rhode Island. La Fayette, without the French fleet to assist him, entered Annapolis, proceeded through Maryland to Alexandria, and then headed for Richmond, which Arnold had taken. Arnold returned to Portsmouth after burning parts of Richmond.

Clinton now saw an opportunity to gain new favor (because of his troops' victory in Virginia) with the Parliament about to open, so he sent Major General [William] Phillips to take command in Virginia. Arnold was quite jealous of Phillips, who in turn, did not like Arnold. They nevertheless advanced together from Portsmouth to Petersburgh where Phillips became ill and died. Some held Arnold responsible for Phillips' death; in any event the death caused discontent in the British army. Cornwallis then joined the troops in Virginia and ravaged the Virginia countryside. Fayette was able to engage Cornwallis, and, with the aid of a Pennsylvania detachment under [General Anthony] Wayne, forced Cornwallis to retreat to Williamsburg, where Cornwallis finally gained a defensible position.

To show the British that the Revolution was not just the work of a faction, Thomson stated that militias from Virginia and the Carolinas co-operated in the Southern campaign, even

though civil government was suspended. Also, the great spirit of the Americans was demonstrated by the British-inspired attempted mutiny in Washington's winter camp. Clinton had sent two emissaries with rewards to entice Americans to defect, but the Americans seized the emissaries and executed them as spies.

Thomson told Jay that Mr. Huntington was forced, because of ill health, to quit the chairmanship of Congress; Mr. McKean was elected as Huntington's successor.

/Several pages were added to the letter on August 9, 1781./

Thomson mentioned some letters of /Lord George/ Germain being intercepted by the Americans.

The rest of the letter was given to a glowing account of the way the Americans had overcome great obstacles in the Revolution to that date /August, 1781/ and questioned the British ignorance of the spirit and bravery of the Americans. The experience of the years since 1775 should have taught the British that war would not be easy with America, who was so determined to win.

9

(From Burnett, Letters, VI, p. 218.) No city given, September 15, 1781. To Meriwether Smith.

Meriwether Smith had asked Thomson's opinion about the sentiment of Congress toward /financial/ advances made to members of Congress in the fall of 1779. Thomson replied that Congress first made advances from necessity, and then only "partially and sparingly." It soon became "so general that most of the members

and states seemed to depend upon it," and then several states began to disapprove of the advances. Congress passed a measure to stop further advances, but they continued to be made, although with increasing reluctance until advances were finally eliminated.

10

(From Collections, pp. 169-70; also in Francis Wharton, ed., The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Washington, 1889, VI, p. 475.) No city given, June 4, 1783. To Robert Livingston.

Thomson expressed regret at receiving Robert R. Livingston's resignation from office [Livingston was Secretary of Foreign Affairs], especially when the cause of the resignation was a salary insufficient to meet Livingston's expenses. Thomson paid Livingston tribute for his work done for America: "I rejoice in the honourable testimonial Congress have given of your ability, zeal & fidelity. I wish the next who fills the office may give as much satisfaction and be equally deserving. . . ."

Thomson pointed out that Livingston must, by Congress' resolution, turn over the sealed papers of his office to Thomson, who would hold them for Congress, though Thomson wished them given to either the first under-Secretary or to a committee of Congress.

11

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, pp. 270-71.) Princeton, August 21, 1783. To Mrs. Hannah Thomson, wife of Charles Thomson.

[This is only an extract of the entire letter.]

Thomson acknowledged receipt of two letters from his wife. Evidently /Jacob/ Read /South Carolina lawyer/ was misinformed of the adjournment of Congress, for Thomson said Congress met on Monday /the day Read evidently said Congress adjourned/ but accomplished little. Thomson was "very apprehensive that nothing but some calamity will awaken the states to a sense of their situation."

Thomson informed his wife that the President of Congress had not found a home in Princeton, and probably would not. The President of Congress had talked of "Elizabethtown . . . as a proper place for the residence of Congress," for he (the President) had a twenty room house in Elizabethtown. Even though this place was infested by mosquitoes in the summer and was "liable to intermittents in the Spring and Fall" these disadvantages would have been overcome by the increased value of the real estate because of Congress' residence in Elizabethtown. But this move would be opposed, Thomson was sure, by other members of Congress; Mr. /John/ Condit /New Jersey physician/ for example, had found lodging in Princeton for three dollars a week, while at Elizabethtown (due to its propinquity to New York City) he would have to pay at least four dollars a week. "This would be a clear loss of 52 dollars a year," Thomson concluded, "which is no trifling consideration. . . ."

12

(From Collections, p. 180.) Annapolis, December 16, 1783. To John De Brett.

Thomson answered a letter of June 13, 1783, from John De Brett in which De Brett sent "the Remembrancers /sic/ and the volumes relative to Burgoyne and the dispute between Clinton & Cornwallis. . . ."

Thomson mentioned the constitutions of the states, which were printed "under circumstances that occasioned some inaccuracies." Thomson intended to revise and republish them, in which event he would send a copy to De Brett.

13

(From Harley, Life, p. 121.) Annapolis, January 7, 1784. To Richard Peters /Philadelphia judge/.

/This is only an extract of the entire letter./

The events of the past six months had given Thomson much agony, for he had taken a great share in the controversy. What consolation he had, came from the fact that the Americans had had an object which attracted the attention of foreign countries and engaged a victorious army. Following the war European attention was focused upon the American Congress and "what a scene have they exhibited! Oh that it could be obliterated from the annals of America and utterly effaced from my memory!" Mr. Read, in a recent speech, alluded to this difficulty of the "vagabondizing" of the Congress from "one paltry village to another. . . ."[6]

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[6]This movement of Congress was presumably the difficulty of the past six months, mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph.

14

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, pp. 412, 413.) Annapolis, January 14, 1784. To Benjamin Franklin.

Thomson had received Franklin's letter of September 13 /1783/ and had taken steps "to procure the intelligence wanted."

A letter, presumably sent by Franklin, from M. De Bernardo was communicated by Thomson to Congress who did not take any action on it.[7] Since the ports of the United States were open to all peoples and since the states would accept "any men of science or abilities who may be willing to settle among them," Congress did not think it necessary to encourage any particular nation or individual.

The definitive treaty was ratified the day Thomson wrote this letter, and had been entrusted with the President's (of Congress) private secretary, Colonel /Josiah/ Harmar.

15

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, pp. 416, 417.) Annapolis, January 15, 1784. To Benjamin Franklin.

In more detail than his letter of the previous day to Franklin, Thomson explained the ratification of the final treaty. January 14 witnessed the first time that nine states (quorum for the treaty ratification) had assembled in Congress since October, 1783; the consent for the treaty was unanimous among both states

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[7]The De Bernardo letter suggested that Italian artificers be introduced into the United States. (Burnett, Letters, VII, p. 413n.)

and individual members of Congress. In order to get the treaty to Franklin /who was in London/ as quickly as possible, Colonel Harmar had been sent from New York, Mr. Morris carried a duplicate, and a triplicate was sent with Lieutenant Colonel D. S. Franks.

Thomson was able to report that the states had finally begun "to comply with the requisitions of Congress and to grant funds for the regular payment of the interest and discharge of the principal of the debts contracted by the war."

16

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, p. 417.) Annapolis, January 15, 1784. To John Jay /London/.

Thomson sent this letter of introduction for Lieutenant Colonel D. S. Franks, bearer of a triplicate of the treaty /see above two letters/ ratified the previous day by Congress. Thomson hoped that the treaty would bring a spirit of conciliation between two late enemy countries, although he realized that the wounds and memories of so recent a war would not be easily healed or forgotten. He feared for Jay's home state /New York/ most of all.

Thomson related that New York had sent no delegates to Congress since November, 1783, but he had been informed that a state law prevented the Assembly from meeting until the City /New York City/ was evacuated. Since the Assembly was now meeting /January, 1784/ Thomson was sure delegates would be forthcoming. Thomson concluded with a mysterious reference to past events:

> There has been a scene for six months past over which I would draw the veil. I may perhaps have an opportunity of explaining myself further. However the prospect begins to brighten and as I love to indulge a hope which corresponds with my fond wishes, I flatter myself that prudence and good sense will prevail.[8]

17

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, pp. 421-22.) Annapolis, January 19, 1784. To Richard Peters /Pennsylvania/.

Thomson had received two letters from Peters carried by Mr. /Peter/ Carlton /from New Hampshire/. Carlton must have had some business to lay before Congress for Thomson, as he relates to Peters, had advised Carlton to wait since only seven states were represented at the time. He assured Peters that he would do as much for Carlton as he could. Thomson paid tribute to Carlton's service to Congress /in an unmentioned capacity/:

> I am exceedingly glad to find that, in the expenditure of so many millions as passed through his hands, his accounts so nearly close. I cannot entertain a doubt but that Congress will make him an allowance for extra services considering his responsibility and the risques he must have run for which the Salary of 900 dollars a year is by no means an adequate Compensation.

Thomson expressed a deep concern for the present state of Congress. He refers to the past six months /see items 10 and 13 above/ as giving him the "most pungent pain." He feared, now that the war was over, that Congress would be more in the world's eye and the picture Congress would present would be highly unfavorable to the United States.

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[8]This reference to the past six months may be to the same controversy found in item 13, p. 31.

> You will judge of the feelings of some of the members /Thomson continued/ by an expression Mr. Read used in a late speech, While C/ongress/ said he are vagabondizing from one paultry village to Another it is impossible for gentlemen to have recourse to books or to consult writers on the laws of nations.

Thomson enclosed a "half sheet" of the Congressional Journal, and promised the other half sheet if the printer finished it quickly enough "before the post arrive/d/." Though much business remained unfinished, the treaty was ratified. Nine states met on January 14, and their uneasiness of the "time elapsed and the danger of the ratification not getting across the Ocean to be exchanged within the time limited . . ." stimulated them to ratify and dispatch the treaty immediately. Colonel Harmar was sent January 15, with the treaty, and Lieutenant Colonel Franks left on January 17. The only other business done was accepting the resignation of General /Washington/.

Thomson was sorry that Peters resigned /his office as delegate to Congress from Pennsylvania/, for he felt Peters was an important and influential member of Congress.

Many delegates were dissatisfied with Annapolis as the cite for Congress, one exception being one "who is of so peculiar a cast of mind that his pleasure seems proportioned to the absurdity of his schemes and who is only mortified when reason and common sense prevail."[9]

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[9]This member was probably Elbridge Gerry. (Burnett, Letters, VII, p. 422n.)

18

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, p. 530.) Annapolis, May 16, 1784. To Thomas Jefferson.

Thomson was sending Jefferson "twenty Commissions" with the necessary papers. There were some changes in these commissions from the original ones that Thomson had prepared, for Congress, so claimed Thomson, was under the influence of the "gerrian taste."

Thomson enclosed a copy of the report which dealt with navigation of the Mississippi. He also had ordered for Jefferson copies of the journal of Congress for 1779-1782, and as much of 1783 as the printer had finished.

After inquiring about the progress of Jefferson's "work"[10] Thomson requested a copy if any were to be "struck off."

Thomson asked Jefferson for information as to who had some papers "relative to Vermont" and "the remonstrance of the delegates of N York" that Jefferson had left with some member of "the Committee."

19

(From Julian P. Boyd, ed., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Princeton, 1952, VII, pp. 272-73; hereafter cited as Boyd, Papers. An extract of this letter may be found in Collections, pp. 189-90, and in Burnett, Letters, VII, p. 531.) Annapolis, May 19, 1784. To Thomas Jefferson.

Thomson was fearful of the future of the Confederation government, for divisions and jealousies among the states were

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[10]This was Jefferson's Notes on Virginia; see item 1, Chapter IV, p. 81.

becoming too frequent. Thomson blamed this attitude partly on the Congress' removal from Philadelphia and the subsequent "unsettled state of Congress." A good example of the type of action that was blocking the possible effectiveness was the action of the committee on qualifications' report on the credentials of the Rhode Island delegates. Several days were consumed in debating the case and no decision was reached. Favorable to the Condeferacy, however, was news that the North Carolina "legislature are disposed to make a cession of Western claims."

Thomson expressed hope that the states would "send forward men of enlarged Minds and conciliating tempers, that matters might not be precip/it/ated and that time might be given for consolidating and strengthening the Confederacy."

20

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, p. 557; Harley, Life, pp. 105, 106.) Philadelphia, June 18, 1784. To John Jay.

Thomson informed Jay of Jay's election by Congress on May 7, 1784, to the office of Secretary for Foreign Affairs. In expressing his own sentiments about this new position for Jay, Thomson wrote:

> I do not know how you will be pleased with the appointment, but this I am sure of--that your country stands in need of your abilities in that office. I feel sensibly that it is not only time, but highly necessary for us to think and act like a sovereign, as well as a free, people; and I wish this sentiment were more deeply impressed on the members of every State in the Union. The opportunities you will have of corresponding not only with the executives but with the several legislatures, in discharging the duties of your office, will I trust greatly contribute to raise and promote this spirit; and this is a reason why I wish you were here to enter on the business.

On the same day of Jay's election, Congress appointed Thomas Jefferson, in addition to previously appointed John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, to negotiate commercial treaties with European nations.

21

(From Collections, pp. 190-92; Boyd, Papers, VII, pp. 305-6.) Philadelphia, June 18, 1784. To Thomas Jefferson /Paris/.

Thomson had sent to France "three commissioners for negotiating, if necessary, additional treaties of Commerce with France, the United Netherlands, and Sweden. . . ."

Thomson then told Jefferson of the latest news of the "affair of Longchamps."[11] Congress had passed an act recommending that the states offer a reward of $500 for Longchamps' capture. Before this act took effect Longchamps was caught, but he was released on bail. During his release he proved himself a menace, so he was jailed; he applied for a writ of habeas corpus, escaped, was rejailed, and would be tried on June 24.

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[11]From Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Charles Thomson, May 21, 1784, in part:

"The principal interesting occurrence here is a very daring insult committed on Mr. Marbois by a Frenchman who calls himself the Chevalr. de Longchamps, but is in fact the nephew of the Minister's steward's wife. He obliged him in his own defense to box in the streets like a porter. He is demanded by the Minister to be delivered up by the Executive here to be sent to France for punishment. They are plodding over the case."

Soon after this letter was written, Jefferson left for France. (Boyd, Papers, p. 282.) See item 24, this chapter, pp. 40-44.

Congress, on June 3, adjourned and agreed to meet at Trenton /New Jersey/ on October 30, 1784. Previous to adjournment, a Committee of the States was appointed and its powers were defined. On June 4 /1784/ the Committee met and appointed Mr. /Samuel/ Hardy as chairman. Thomson /who must have been secretary for the Committee/ requested and was given permission to return to Philadelphia. The Committee then adjourned and agreed to meet at Annapolis on June 26 /1784/.

Thomson was discontented with the way Congress went from place to place to meet.

In a postscript, Thomson added he was including a letter to John Jay, who was in France. Thomson also wished Jefferson to take Mr. Isaac Norris, a relative of Mrs. Thomson, under his care, as Jay had previously done for Isaac Norris.

22

(Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 854-55; extract in Harley, Life, pp. 117-18.) Philadelphia, August 13, 1784. To the Chairman of the Committee of the States /Samuel Hardy/.

A letter from Mr. /Benjamin/ Bankson, a member of the Committee of the States, upset Thomson and caused him to write Hardy. Bankson's letter informed Thomson that since four members of the Committee were leaving town, the Committee would dissolve. Thomson considered this a blow to the United States, since it would leave the country "without any head or visible authority." At that very time the people of Connecticut and Pennsylvania

were at war at "Wyoming," and the Indians were distressing the frontier. The Committee could have met elsewhere than Annapolis, since the "sickly season" was approaching Annapolis. In any event, Thomson desired instructions on the removal of the papers of the Committee, and would wait with "Impatience" for Hardy's answer.

23

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 855.) Philadelphia, August 13, 1784. To Benjamin Bankson.

In answer to Bankson's letter /see item 22 above/ which informed Thomson of the departure of four members of the Committee of the States, Thomson hoped that the gentlemen would not leave without giving directions about the removal "of the Offices." If the Committee were to be dissolved, Thomson felt the papers should be packed up and removed to Philadelphia. He waited with "impatience" for further instructions.

24

(From Harley, Life, pp. 106-13; extracts are found in Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 856, 857.) Philadelphia, August 13, 1784. To Benjamin Franklin /London/.

Thomson was glad for the renewed correspondence between two friends. Though he did not give Franklin a complete narration of the current state of affairs, he told Franklin that Jefferson would relay all the news to Franklin. The lack of signature on the letter of January 5, 1784, was due to the hasty departure of the ship. Jay had been appointed Secretary of Foreign Affairs,

and though Thomson had written Jay of this appointment[12] no word had returned from Jay. Colonel Harmar arrived with the Marquis de la Fayette and brought Thomson, on August 8, 1784, Franklin's letters which announced the "exchange of the ratification of the definitive treaty of Peace. . . ." Thomson congratulated Franklin on the successful completion of a hazardous undertaking. Though Thomson never doubted the "issue," he was afraid it would come prematurely for the Americans. The colonies were separate governments, were jealous of each other, and had local interests and prejudices. Intercourse with foreign countries was almost forbidden by Great Britain, and funds were insufficient to establish public credit and economy. When the established order was dissolved, confusion was incumbent; the new government, which was in the hands of the people, gave little opportunity to build national sentiment. But progress could be seen, and the people and states realized their responsibilities, both financial and patriotic, to the country. Those who remained obstinate, as Rhode Island, would be overcome eventually.

Thomson was certain Great Britain would avenge her losses as quickly as possible. Dissension between states and between the United States and France would doubtless be attempted by Britain and other foreigners who came in increasing numbers to America to put "their arts in practice."

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[12]See item 20, this chapter, pp. 37-8.

The most recent "outrage" in Philadelphia seemed to have been committed to estrange the intercourse between the United States and France, and centered in the person of Longchamps, a Frenchman. A newly published paper in Philadelphia, for Courier de l' Amerique seemed designed toward the same purpose, for the account of the Longchamps affair and the tenor of other articles reflected a strong bias against France.[13]

Thomson sent Franklin the Courier de l' Amerique as it had been published to that time and which explained the Longchamps affair as far as it had progressed. The question then under discussion focused on whether Longchamps, who was confined in prison, could be "legally delivered up by Council according to the claim made by the late Minister of France. . . ." Congress was discussing the question and was considering a bill "effectually securing the rights and immunities of public ministers and punishing the violators of them."

In giving Franklin some details of the case, Thomson related that Longchamps, who had been an officer in the French service, had come to the Boston camp in 1776. He was cordially received in the American camp, but after some weeks, Thomson continued,

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[13]For a complete summary of the Longchamps problem, see Alfred Rosenthal, "The Marbois-Longchamps Affair," the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXIII (July, 1939), pp. 294-301.

> he took advantage of a pass given for the purpose of going into the country, to slip into Boston, which we were beseiging; . . . he wanted permission of General Gage to come again into our camp, but for some reason that does not appear, it was not granted. In short, from many circumstances there is reason to suspect that at that time he either was or wished to be employed as a spy by the British General. Whether his late crime is the effect of sudden passion or the result of premeditated plan may possibly in time be manifested.

The Longchamps trial was under way, and further of his actions not reported in the papers, were deemed important for Franklin to know:

> On the 17th he committed the first insult; on the 18th he went to a Justice of the peace and took an Oath of allegiance to the state, after which he perpetrated the outrage on the 19th.

Longchamps' plan in taking the oath was interpreted in various ways: some felt that he meant to "secure himself from the French laws and from the power and resentment of the consul"; others felt that by becoming a citizen [of the United States] he would gain the sentiment of the Americans. But in any event, the lawyers who represented Longchamps "laid little stress" on the oath, and the bench believed that the oath was of no effect and Longchamps was to be considered an alien.

Jefferson had carried some commissions from Congress to Franklin, and Thomson hoped that they would inform Franklin of Congress' purposes in regards to his (Franklin's) "request of recall," as well as enable him to "satisfy the Danish Minister and to proceed on commercial treaties with Great Britain and other powers." Thomson wished he could give Franklin some

assurance that Franklin's secretary, "W.T.F." /William Temple Franklin/ would find employment in the United States, but even though he /William Franklin/ was well spoken of, it would be well to look beyond Congress for employment. There was always room for hope, due to sudden changes, but it would be well to own other means of support than having to depend upon "public employ."

Thomson had attempted unsuccessfully to "find out Philip Hearn." He had learned upon inquiry that "Holland" had come to America in 1775, had served as "adjutant to a regiment," had been promoted, in 1776 to the rank of captain in the Delaware regiment, and had been killed in 1777 in the battle of Germantown. He had married a daughter of Parson Ross of Delaware, "by whom he left issue," and his widow and children were receiving a pension from the Delaware Assembly in conformity to a recommendation of Congress.

Marquis de la Fayette was received in Philadelphia with "cordiality and affection . . . by all ranks of people." From Philadelphia, la Fayette went to see General Washington. Mr. /Henry/ Laurens had arrived in New York but had not yet come to Philadelphia. Since this letter had become so long, Thomson had no time to write Jefferson as he intended, so he asked Franklin to remember him to Jefferson and Mr. /John/ Adams.

25

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 862.) Philadelphia, August 17, 1784. To the Chairman of the Committee of States [Samuel Hardy].

Upon receiving Hardy's letter of August 13, Thomson went immediately to Mr. Bailey and learned that Bailey had not one "of the books of Constitutions left." Bailey had sent several of the books to England, but he later ordered them back and should have received them at any time. As soon as they arrived, Thomson promised to forward one to Hardy or the governor.

Since the members of the Committee of the States had left Annapolis, Thomson wondered if it would not be proper to remove the papers of the Committee to Philadelphia, where he could have necessary printing done before Congress next met.

26

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, pp. 586-87; first paragraph of the letter is in Harley, Life, pp. 118-19.) Philadelphia, August 22, 1784. To John Montgomery [Carlisle, Pennsylvania].

Thomson had received Montgomery's letter of August 2, 1784, in which Montgomery stated he had received no answer to a question he had sent to the president of Congress. Thomson pointed out that experience should show that

> there are mysteries in government which little folks are not to be permitted to pry into, and which are only to be communicated to such as are deeply skilled in what the wise King James used to call kingcraft.[14]

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[14]This was not meant as a severe reply, but rather as a sympathetic reply to Montgomery's frustrations.

Montgomery also mentioned in his letter to Thomson that he would see Thomson on September 1, 1784, /when the Committee of the States would next meet, for Montgomery was evidently a member of the Committee/. Thomson replied that Messrs. /Francis/ Dana /Massachusetts representative to Congress and later diplomat to Russia/, /Jonathan/ Blanchard /New Hampshire representative to Congress/, and /Samuel/ Dick /New Jersey physician and representative to Congress/ all left the Committee on August 11 and returned home. The remaining members then left for lack of sufficient number to enact business, and advised Thomson to move the papers of the Committee /from Annapolis/ to Philadelphia.

In a postscript added August 23, Thomson told Montgomery of a letter from Hardy who advised Thomson that the Committee would meet in Philadelphia.

27

(From Burnett, Letters, VII, p. 593.) Philadelphia, September 27, 1784. To Jacob Reed.

After waiting for some momentous news to communicate, Thomson concluded everything was going as usual: "Our assembly goes on squabling and our newspapers /continue/ to disseminate scurrility." Though five states were represented, there still were not sufficient delegates for the Committee of the States to function. Thomson felt the Committee to be a vital part of America's government, and wrote that:

> time will evince that it is of no small consequence to save appearances with foreign nations, and not to suffer the federal government to become invisible. A government without a visible head must appear a strange phenomenon to European politicians and will I fear lead them to form no very favourable opinion of our stability, wisdom or Union.

He asked Read to urge Connecticut and Rhode Island to send delegates to the Committee.

Thomson was informed that everyone in Annapolis was ill with "fever and intermittents."

In a postscript, Thomson passed on information he had received from /Henry/ Laurens /President of Congress/ that Congress would not meet before Laurens "sets off for the Southward."

28

(From Collections, pp. 192-94.) Philadelphia, October 1, 1784. To Thomas Jefferson /Paris/.

Thomson told of the meeting of the Committee of the States. On June 26, 1784, nine states met "but not with the harmony and good humor that could have been wished." /Evidently the Committee of the States was to referee in the western land claims of the states, for/ on June 26, Pennsylvania sent deputies to appear before the Committee "to decide on the claims respecting the private right of soil of the Wioming lands between the claimants under grants from Pennsylvania and Connecticut." But since the Connecticut deputies did not appear, and the Committee of the States had not assembled, nothing was done about the dispute. Thomson stated that the "affair remains in a very disagreeable situation and is like to produce very unhappy consequences."

July 24 [1784] a motion was made for the Committee of the States to adjourn to Trenton [where the Congress would next meet] but the motion lost. In August the motion was renewed, but again it lost. Three members now went home, and the other waited, advised Thomson to move the Committee's papers to Philadelphia, and wrote the states to send delegates to Philadelphia. Five arrived, but it was unlikely that the Committee would meet before Congress would (October 30). Thomson feared all this vacillation would produce an unfavorable image in Europe of the United States.

Thomson then told of the latest news concerning the evacuation of the British from the western posts in America. Though General Haldiman of Canada had received official notice of ratification of the Treaty [of Paris, 1783], yet the western posts were still not evacuated. Thomson did not know what action Congress would take.

Rhode Island still remained obstinate and "refuses to grant the impost, which seems to be the only means of establishing national credit and reputation and giving us weight with foreign nations."

Thomson said he had written Benjamin Franklin about the Longchamps affair.[15] Thomson had not heard whether Jay had accepted the Secretary of Foreign Affairs office [vacated by

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[15]See item 24, this chapter, pp. 40-44.

Robert Livingstone's resignation; see item 20, this chapter, p. 37/ although he hoped Jay would.

A "Mr. S." arrived in town, expecting the same reception the Marquis de la Fayette received, and had "communications to make respecting their /S's unnamed country/ affairs in Europe."

Spain still desired exclusive navigation of the Mississippi River. Thomson saw a letter from "Galvez, the /Spanish/ Minister for the American department, wherein he (Galvez) desires him /an American named Rendon/ to inform Congress that the intercourse with New Orleans and with Havanna is shut till the boundaries between the U.S. and Spain are settled, and that the court cannot admit that England had a right to settle the boundaries with the U.S. in that country which Spain had conquered in 1782--before the provisional treaty."

29

(From Collections, pp. 195-96; Boyd, Papers, VII, p. 454.) Philadelphia, October 26, 1784. To Thomas Jefferson /Paris/.

Thomson inclosed a letter of /James/ Madison which Thomson thought treated the southern boundary question fully.[16] Thomson had been told that Spain was fortifying Natches.

Thomson was told by American merchants that, in Lisbon, flour is taken from the ships by public /Spanish/ officers who retail it in very small quantities; this was destructive to trade

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[16]See item 28, this chapter, pp. 47-49.

and shipping, for it was very time consuming. Thomson wished Jefferson, in case a commercial treaty was worked out with Spain, to check and correct this detail, since the flour and corn trade was important to the middle states in the United States

30

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 84-5.) No city given, April 3, 1785. To Mrs. Hannah Thomson [wife of Charles Thomson].

Thomson blamed the bad weather for the lack of correspondence from Mrs. Thomson.

The chief concern of Thomson in this letter was the future of his position as secretary of Congress. There were two conflicting movements under way for this office: the group who desired, and got Thomson's opinion "on the duties of the office and the necessity of erecting a new department," appeared to have bungled the scheme. On the other hand, the "plan and schemes of malice were deeper and better laid." This group, under the pretence to gather information about the duties of the secretary, prepared an ordinance "with such art that it should be rather for the purpose of establishing a new office than for ascertaining the powers of one already established." This ordinance would provide an opportunity for a new election, and "provided there was any probability of gratifying resentment in that way to say nothing of the term of continuance in Office, but if that could not be obtained, then to introduce a clause for an annual election."

This second plan was "prosecuted with that persevering cunning and malice for which the author of it is distinguished."[17]

Thomson told his wife he would explain further when they next met.

31

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 103.) Philadelphia, April 22, 1785. To George Washington /Mount Vernon/.

Thomson informed Washington that his (Washington's) letter of April 5, 1785, had been sent to John Jay, since this letter belonged to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Thomson referred to a "list" in Washington's possession which would be of value to the negotiators in London; Thomson had suggested to Jay that a clerk be sent /to Mount Vernon/ to make a copy of it.

Feeling that the papers of Washington would be an invaluable source for future historians, Thomson hoped that Washington would

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[17]Thomson's antagonist seems to have been Elbridge Gerry, who was one of the chief critics of Thomson's conduct of his office. On February 11, 1784, Gerry moved that a committee be appointed "to revise the regulation of the department of the secretary of Congress. . . ." This revision appears to have been dropped at this time, but was revived January 31, 1785, when a committee was appointed to "revise the institution of the Office of the Secretary of Congress." An ordinance for this purpose was brought in February 25, 1785, and eventually was adopted March 31, 1785.

The original plotter could have been Charles Pinckney, who had moved on March 18, 1785, to create a secretary for the home department that both Pinckney and Gerry were urging Congress to set up. (Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 84n, 85n.)

have his papers copied. Thomson had requested Congress to adopt measures necessary to this end, but Congress, at this writing, had not done so.

At this time, Thomson was busy making preparations for his family's moving to New York.

32

(From Collections, pp. 205-6; Boyd, Papers, IX, pp. 379-80.) New York, April 6, 1786. To Thomas Jefferson /Paris/.

Jefferson had mentioned, in a letter of October 8, 1785, to Thomson, the experiments in balloons in France and the death of two balloonists. Thomson remarked that the "ballon discovery had had a rapid rise /here/ and has been pursued with great spirit as a raree show." Thomson also mentioned the passing of animal magnetism in America.[18]

The latter half of the letter concerns itself with a glowing picture of the progress of the United States: "there is not upon the face of the earth a body of people more happy or rising into consequence with more rapid strides than the inhabitants of the United States of America." The population was increasing; new lands were being cleared, new settlements and buildings were being erected, and new manufacturing being opened up; and people were "well clad, well fed, and well housed." Yet all was not all golden, for the "merchants are

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[18]See item 1, Chapter IV, pp. 81-2.

complaining that trade is dull, the farmers that wheat and other produce are falling, the landlords that rent is lowering, the speculists and extravagant that they are compelled to pay their debts, and the idle and the vain that they cannot live at others cost and gratify their pride with articles of luxury." Individual happiness was the general goal of most Americans. National patriotism was not yet aroused among the masses, but the states were taking care of their finances: "Twelve States have granted Congress the impost for discharging the principal and interest of the Nat. Debt, and it is expected N. York will grant it in the present session of their Legislature."

Thomson closed by mentioning that three friends of Jefferson ("Read," "Gerry," and "Montor") were getting married and one ("Osgood") was "on the brink of matrimony."

33

(From Collections, p. 208.) New York, June 5, 1786. To General Nathaniel Greene /Georgia/.

Thomson was answering a letter of Greene's of April 24, 1786, in which Greene requested some "prints" be sent to him (Greene). Thomson said he was forwarding the prints by the schooner "Happy Return" and enclosed in the letter the bill of lading.

Greene had also mentioned that Georgia was turning to a more "enlightened, and a more liberal policy" and that the recommendations that Congress had passed for Georgia were being

put into effect by Georgia's legislature. Thomson expressed satisfaction with this turn in politics in Georgia and hoped that "as the State increases in importance it will contribute to the utmost of its power and influence to give weight & dignity to the Federal Council," for Thomson thought this to be the only means of preserving internal peace.

34

(From Collections, pp. 215-29.) New York, November 4, 1786. To Doctor David Ramsay.

This lengthy letter is in answer to Ramsay's letter of September 25, 1786, in which Ramsay included six copies of a history he had written. Thomson had sent the copies on to Mr. King, as Ramsay requested.

After making some preliminary remarks about the use of certain words, Thomson launched into the criticisms of the facts Ramsay included in his history. First of all, the proclamation that Ramsay attributed to General Washington when he first took command of the army, was really drawn up by Congress. The consideration of this proclamation proceeded /in Congress/ at the same time as the petition to the King.

Next, Thomson felt Ramsay had exaggerated the account of the works at Bunker Hill, and he had agreed with the enemy in saying that Americans had fired on the British from houses in Charlestown. Concerning Charlestown, a British leader had told the Americans that if the American army approached Boston from

the Charlestown side, he would be forced to order Charlestown to be burned, for he could not allow it to cover the approach of the enemy. This was made known to the people of Charlestown, who then fled when the Americans approached. An inhabitant of Charlestown informed Thomson that he did not believe a single gun was fired from a house at that time.

In regards to Bunker Hill, no group, in the space of three or four hours, could throw up extensive earthworks. Thomson described the scene in a detailed manner:

> The truth is our people marched over the causeway and took possession of the Hill later at night, instantly broke ground and threw up some slight redoubts of earth. They were discovered at day break, and a detachment was immediately sent to dislodge them. This detachment landed at a point on the Bay at a considerable distance from the town. Upon seeing the number of our troops on the heights, they halted and sent back for reinforcements. Upon this our troops immediately pulled up the post and rail fences which enclosed the lots between the town and the Bay, and set them down again in two parallel rows at a small distance from each other, extending from the eastern redoubt on the right to the town, and on the left to the Bay. The space between the two lines they filled with hay which had been lately mowed and remained on the lots in cocks. These were the Formidable Works behind which they sheltered themselves and waited the assault of the Enemy.

Thomson then suggested that Ramsay travel through the various states and view the scenes of action for himself to get a truer picture.

Further, Thomson disliked the account Ramsay wrote of the way in which the support of Pennsylvania for the war effort was acquired. He urged Ramsay either to alter that part of his history or leave it out. In addition, several facts were omitted:

the way in which Gage disarmed Bostonians; the manner in which the American army was furnished; and the way that news travelled so quickly through the states. Thomson then suggested a paragraph to tell of the political subdivision of the states into various smaller units: counties, districts, towns, townships, hundreds or parishes. The Association, formed in 1767 as a part of the protest against the Revenue Act, gave the colonies a system of Committees for sending and receiving news. The expense for this was born by private contributions.

The remainder of the letter dealt with a detailed summary of the action of Pennsylvania following news of the Boston Port Act [which was to go into effect June 1, 1774]. The Committee of Philadelphia received a public letter from Boston, and realizing the importance of it, made arrangements to read it at a coffee house [May 19, 1774] and at the City Tavern the following night, because the Tavern had a large room with a capacity for several hundred persons.

On May 20 the letter was read, and the Boston Port Act, along with other plans of the British administration were discussed. All present seemed to feel that the acts affected all the colonies, but the debate soon became heated over what steps would be necessary for Boston. Agreement was quickly reached, however, simply to write a letter to Boston, and a Committee, with persons of varying opinions were appointed to frame such an answer. The letter sent was "firm but

temperate." Thomson described the answer as acknowledging

> the difficulty in offering advice on the present occasion, sympathized with them in their distress, and observing that all measures for obtaining redress should be first tried; that if the making restitution for the tea destroyed would put an end to this unhappy controversy and leave the people of Boston upon their ancient footing of Constitutional Liberty, it would not admit of a doubt what part they should act. But it was not the value of the tea it was the indefeasible right of giving and granting their own money which was now the matter in consideration;

Since this was the common cause of all the colonies, a general Congress of representatives of all the colonies should be called to discuss means of restoring harmony between the colonies and Great Britain. But until this could be effected, the Pennsylvanians recommended "firmness, prudence, and moderation" to the Bostonians and assured them that Pennsylvania would continue to evince the "Cause of American Liberty."

In addition to the letter to Boston, the Committee sent word to the colonies south of Pennsylvania suggesting a general congress of all the colonies. Furthermore, a series of letters was published in the Pennsylvania papers to awaken the people to the impending danger. On June 1 [1774] when the Act went into effect, Pennsylvania had a day of "Public Calamity and Grief" complete with divine services.

Next the Committee petitioned the Governor to convene the Assembly of Pennsylvania. This petition included a sketch of the recent events in Boston, told of the imminent danger to all Americans from Parliament's recent actions, and urged the

convening of the Assembly in order to not only "devise measures to compose and relieve the anxieties of the people, but restore that harmony and peace between the Mother Country and the Colonies. . . ." It was signed by more than 900 freeholders and on June 8 was presented to the Governor, who promptly refused it because the peace and tranquility of the province appeared to be in no danger. Though the Committee wished the Assembly had been called, they did not desire trouble that might endanger their personal safety and bring disorder to the colony, so they consented to a meeting of the freemen of Philadelphia city and county.

This meeting was held on June 18 and attended by approximately 8,000 persons. Since none were admitted except those who could vote for representatives to the Assembly, the meeting was held in good order. Five resolutions were passed unanimously in the meeting:

1. Resolved, that Boston Port Act was unconstitutional, oppressive to Bostonians, dangerous to all British colonies, and therefore the cause of Boston was the common cause of America.
2. Resolved, that a Congress of deputies from the North American colonies was the best way of obtaining relief from and re-establishing harmony with Great Britain.
3. Resolved, that a committee should be appointed for the city and county of Philadelphia to correspond with other colonies.

4. Resolved, that the committee should meet to decide the proper course of action for Pennsylvania, appoint deputies to attend a general Congress, and ascertain the best way for Pennsylvania to be represented at such a general Congress.

5. Resolved, that the committee should collect money for the people of Boston to help in their relief.

A committee was then appointed, made up of the former committee along with enough new members to give those in favor of the above measures an ample majority. The new committee (of forty-three members) met and conducted the business as outlined in the resolves. The Speaker of the Assembly was written and urged to call the Assembly to meet not later than August 1. Next, the committee wrote each county requesting them to appoint a committee to meet in Philadelphia and this conference of county committees would then appoint delegates for a general Congress of all colonies. The central committee (of forty-three) did not trust the state Assembly, and especially the Speaker, to appoint delegates who favored the more extreme action; but even more, the committee feared the Assembly would adjourn without appointing any delegates.

The Speaker did agree to call the Assembly, but the Governor pre-empted this call by ordering the Assembly to meet on July 18 in order, the Governor claimed, to deal with an Indian problem. Due to the committee's distrust of the Assembly,

the county committees were called to meet on July 15. The counties readily assented to this call and met on the day so appointed. The resolutions passed at this meeting were legion:

1. The Pennsylvanians acknowledged themselves as loyal subjects of King George III.

2. The differences between the colonies and Great Britain were viewed as "grievous" and "destructive."

3. Harmony with Britain should be restored "on the principles of the Constitution."

4. The colonials were entitled to the same rights in the colonies as the English had in England.

5. The source of the differences between mother country and colonies was the assumed, though unconstitutional, right of Parliament "to bind the people of these Colonies 'by statutes in all cases whatsoever.'"

6. The Boston Port Act was "unconstitutional," "oppresive" to Bostonians, and "dangerous" to the liberties of all the British colonies, so that Boston was suffering the common cause of all the colonies.

7. The proposed Administration of Justice Act, if passed, would also be "unconstitutional," "oppressive," and "dangerous," as the Boston Port Act.

8. The Massachusetts Government Act, if passed, would be "unconstitutional" and "dangerous" to the colonies.

9. An "absolute necessity" existed to call a general Congress of representatives from all the colonies in order to formulate plans to obtain relief for the "suffering brethren" and redress for the colonists' grievances, so that harmony could be restored between Britain and the colonies "on a constitutional foundation."

10. Although a suspension of commerce with Great Britain would call for sacrifices from the colonists, they were willing to do so only after a more "gentler mode" was attempted.

(The next two resolves were passed by a majority, though not unanimously.)

11. The people of Pennsylvania would agree and join with the other colonies if Congress were to consent to non-importation from and non-exportation to Great Britain.

12. If Congress were to deem it necessary, due to further proceedings of Parliament, to go beyond the provisions of the 11th resolve, Pennsylvania would support such steps.

(The last four resolves were passed unanimously.)

13. The merchants of Pennsylvania should not take advantage of the 11th resolve, but rather should sell their merchandise at the same rates "they have been accustomed to do within three months last past."

14. The people of Pennsylvania would sever all commercial with any colony, or city or town within a colony, that

would refuse to support the general plan adopted by Congress.

15. Every member of this committee should do all he could to promote the financial relief for Boston.

16. The members of the committee should also inform their Assembly representatives of the present state of affairs and tell them to appoint delegates to a general Congress so that the goals in the ninth resolve could be realized.

In addition to these resolves, the committee prepared instructions, signed by the chairman July 21 and sent to the Assembly, which was then meeting. These instructions (styled by Thomson as "bold, animated, and pathetic") pointed out the source of the present difficulties, urged the appointment of delegates to a general Congress, and outlined the

> measures that appeared most likely to produce that effect and the terms of a Compact to be settled between the two Countries so as to put a final period to the unconstitutional Claims of the one and the fears and jealousies of the other.

Thomson then makes reference to a "curious paper" which he included in this letter /but it is not published/.[19]

Deputies were soon appointed by the Assembly, Thomson went on, and then Pennsylvania, with its "whole weight and influence" joined the American cause against Great Britain.

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[19]This paper was an essay on the constitutional power of Great Britain over the colonies in America. It is found in John Dickinson's Political Writings, 1801, I, pp. 285-416.

One minor change which Thomson requested was to let the reference to his own appointment to office simply stand as, "Charles Thomson, of Philadelphia," striking out his part in the affairs of Pennsylvania.

35

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 614.) New York, June 25, 1787. To William Bingham /Philadelphia/.

On his arrival in New York Thomson found that five states were represented in Congress (Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and South Carolina); the addition of Pennsylvania and North Carolina would "form a Congress." Since the United States should at least maintain a form of government and since the North Carolina delegates were already in Philadelphia, Thomson desired their (and Bingham's) attendance at once. The gravity of the situation was expressed by Thomson: "Were I to hazard an Opinion it would be that the peace of the union and the happy termination of the measures of the Convention depend on the Meeting and continuance of Congress and keeping up the form of government until the New plan is ready for Adoption." If the President had returned, Bingham was urged to "press him on immediately."

36

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 617-18.) New York, July 8, 1787. To William Bingham /Philadelphia/.

In a rather curt letter, Thomson, as Congress had directed him, requested the executives of the states unrepresented in

Congress to request their delegates to hurry to Congress. Thomson urged either Bingham or his colleagues to attend immediately. The absence of the president (for which Thomson could not account) was both embarrassing and offending; if Thomson knew where to write, he would take the liberty to ask him to come immediately.[20]

37

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 691.) Office of Secretary of Congress, December 27, 1787. To Samuel Huntington, Governor of Connecticut.

Thomson acknowledged receipt of Huntington's letter of December 11, and was glad to find that two delegates had been appointed to represent Connecticut in Congress.

Late news included information that Georgia intended to battle the Creek Indians; the Georgia Assembly had passed an act to raise three thousand men with provisions for the Governor to call one thousand five hundred additional men if necessary. Also, Georgia expected to call upon Congress for assistance.

Massachusetts and Virginia had diverted national-earmarked funds into state purposes; this would likely leave Congress, Thomson believed, without the means to maintain the few troops on the frontiers, let alone the necessary expenses of government.

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[20]The letters of June 25 and July 8 must have achieved results, for President St. Clair was in attendance July 17, and Bingham July 25. (Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 618n.)

38

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 720-22.) New York, April 19, 1788. To James McHenry.

Thomson apologized and explained why he was so late in answering McHenry's letter of March 19, 1788. After returning to New York and receiving McHenry's letter of April 12, 1788, Thomson was finally able to answer.

He hoped the recent elections would ensure the adoption of the "New Constitution," for unless it would be adopted, Thomson feared for the future of the country. He did not think the present government /Articles of Confederation/ could "survive the present year and if it could experience must have convinced every man of reflection that it is altogether inadequate to the end designed." And if the nation's government were dissolved, what would secure the independence, peace, and happiness of the country?

McHenry had asked about the foreign and domestic debt. Thomson enclosed a schedule for the French and Dutch loans; to these loans were added $150,000 due Spain and $186,427 due "foreign Officers," plus a million florins which were borrowed to pay the interest of Dutch loans and other European demands due; this last money was supposed to come from states, but they failed to supply the amount needed to pay the interest. The domestic debt, at that time (April, 1788), was $28,340,018, though Thomson was not sure how much of this had been paid through

the sale of western territories. The Ohio Company was supposed to have purchased five or six million acres, but they had only paid $500,000, the rest to be paid in yearly installments, with the condition that the Company could limit their purchase to what they could afford. Other western land sales included two million acres to /John Cleves/ Symmes /had been a member of Continental Congress from New Jersey/ and three million acres to Flint Parker and Company, though neither had paid any money. Seven hundred thousand acres had been surveyed and divided into townships under the Land Ordinance /of 1785/, but only one hundred thousand had been sold. Thomson definitely held that the unsurveyed land was enough to liquidate the entire debt of the Union, provided a stable government controlled the Union. He further conjectured that the new government, if established, would increase the duties on the impost and reduce the expense of the "civil list;" he also added that even though this new government had been given the power of direct taxation, "it will not proceed to the exercise of that power except in the last necessity."

Thomson enclosed, for McHenry's perusal, the first volume of the "foederalist" and would send the second as soon as it was off the press.

39

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 829-30; Collections, pp. 249-50; extract in Harley, Life, pp. 128-29.) New York, April 7, 1789. To Robert Morris.

Thomson had determined to retire to private life, but some of his close friends urged him to continue in a public position. Though he was sure they over-rated his abilities, he consented to serve in the new government if certain conditions were met. First, he wished to be the keeper of the great seal and the papers of the late Continental Congress, and he wished his office to be made the depository of the acts, laws, and archives of Congress. Further, he wished the same salary he had been receiving with his new title to be "Secretary of the Senate and of the United States of Congress." Besides clerks, he wished a deputy to be nominated and appointed by the Senate to do the "ordinary business of the house" in order that he might be free from attending except on special occasions. If all this were acceptable to the Senate he would serve; if not, he would return to private life with the prayer that the new government "may prove effectual to secure the tranquility and promote the happiness and glory of the United States."[21]

40

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 835-36.) No city given, May 20, /1789/. To John Vining, United States Representative.

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[21]Samuel Otis, in a letter of January 12, 1789, to Jeremiah Wadsworth, said that Thomson would not accept the office of clerk of the Senate, which his (Thomson's) friends had apparently tried to secure for him. Either the proposition made in the letter to Morris /above/ was unacceptable, or Otis had, perhaps, acquired sufficient support for his own election. The day the letter to Morris was written Thomson left for Mt. Vernon. (Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 814-15, 830n.)

In response to a question by Vining [in which Vining had asked Thomson's opinion about the creation of a Domestic Department in the House of Representatives] Thomson replied that he did not desire to discuss Vining's question. Because of the complexity of the United States government, the differing interests within the nation, the need for reconciling the states to each other and to the federal government in order to form a united country, and the problems associated with the Indians, the time, attention, and abilities of those in the government would be amply occupied with the domestic affairs of the nation.[22]

41

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 836-37.) No city given, July 17, 1789. To the Board of Treasury of the United States.

In a sharp letter, Thomson demanded to know the meaning of an accountant's report Thomson had read (and enclosed in this letter; it is also published) which stated that Thomson could not receive any salary beyond March 31, 1789, since his office of secretary had not been approved by the present Congress. The report was signed and "approved." Thomson demanded to know what the "approved" stood for--was his account rejected or approved? If his account was rejected he asked, "are the accounts of the

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[22]On May 19, 1789, Vining suggested to the House of Representatives the addition of a Home of Domestic Department, but later withdrew this suggestion. On July 23, 1789, he "introduced a resolution for the adoption of a Home Department. . . ." (Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 835n.)

officers in the other offices under the late Congress passed? if they be; have those Officers been recognised by the present Congress? Why then the distinction." Thomson then claimed that "the Office and the papers are in the care and custody of the respective officers under the late Congress and must be so regularly till they are relieved, and discharged of their trust." He then asked if his office was to be distinguished from the others and the officers refused their compensation.

42

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 837.) No city given, July 23, 1789. To the President of the United States /George Washington/.

Thomson, having served as Secretary of Congress from 1774 to 1789, and witnessed in an intimate way the most eventful period of the United States' history to that time, wished to retire to private life.

He surrendered to Washington the "books, records and papers of the late Congress" which Thomson deposited in the rooms where the legislature met; he delivered also the Great Seal of the United States, and the seal of the Admiralty, both of which were in his keeping.

He recommended, to Washington, his faithful deputy, Mr. Roger Alden, and his diligent clerk, Mr. John Fisher, who remained unemployed.

43

(From Collections, pp. 251-52; extract in Harley, Life, pp. 131-32.) New York, July 25, 1789. To General Washington, President of the United States.

Thomson thanked Washington for the kind letter Washington had sent him. Because he held Washington in such high esteem and felt his leadership as the "Saviour and Father of your Country" to be Providentially provided, Thomson confessed he would have liked to serve in Washington's administration. But it seemed to be the will of God that he retire to private life, and in consequence of this decision, he had rendered his resignation. He did have the consolation that his retiring was not occasioned by Washington's disapproval of him.

As Washington had requested, Thomson had delivered the books, records, and papers of the late Congress to Roger Alden, who would wait upon Washington for the Great Seal of the United States and the Seal of the Admiralty which Thomson had given Washington.

44

(From Collections, pp. 254-56.) No city given, March 9, 1795. To an unidentified person.

/This is only an extract of the entire letter./

Thomson was concerned about a mistake he noted in a biography of Captain Cook, written by Doctor Kippis. In this volume (volume two, page 268 of the biography) Kippis wrote that Benjamin Franklin supposedly ordered the American navy to treat

Cook as a friend rather than as an enemy. In a letter to Thomson from whomever Thomson was writing, a Doctor Belknap stated that Congress reversed Franklin's order and went further by stating that Cook should be apprehended if seen. Thomson claimed, on the other hand, that Congress neither changed Franklin's order nor ordered Cook's seizure. Though it was true that by the order of Congress on May 2, 1780, certain ships were exempted from seizure (Bermuda inhabitants or ships bringing people to reside in the United States), Cook was not mentioned. Further, when this act was passed, Congress had no direction from Franklin; in fact, only two letters were received from Franklin during this time: one received February 23, 1780, and the other March 4, 1780, neither of which included any such order.

Dr. Kippis also claimed that he had received this account from Joseph Banks, but Thomson claimed that Banks had no personal knowledge about this. Thomson concluded that this either had come from "misinformation," or from an intentional lie perpetuated by the enemy.

45

(From Collections, pp. 274-86; Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, II, Philadelphia, 1878, pp. 411-23; extracts in Harley, Life, pp. 71-74; 79-81.) No city given, no date given.[23] To William Henry Drayton.

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[23]It has been suggested that this letter was probably written after Drayton became a member of Congress, which was in 1778. There is no evidence that Drayton and Thomson were acquainted prior to that time. (Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, II, p. 411.)

[Thomson was writing in defense of John Dickinson, since in Drayton's draft of his history there appeared some false information regarding Dickinson.]

John Dickinson's first writing in favor of the colonists was in 1765 during the Stamp Act crisis. In 1767 and 1768, Dickinson published his Farmer's Letters in defense of the colonists and against the Revenue Acts. Some Philadelphia merchants, in 1772, were anxious to draw Dickinson into the dispute over the East India Company, but an intimate friend prevented him from becoming involved. But in 1774, when the Boston Port Bill was passed, this same friend, who was himself involved in the opposition, wrote to Dickinson and urged him to write against Britain. Dickinson obligingly then began a series of letters.

The letter from Boston[24] arrived in Philadelphia the day after Dickinson started his series of letters, and the Philadelphians wanted to take action. Since the Quakers were pacifists, it was necessary to devise a scheme whereby they would support the colony, for their cooperation would assure an undivided colony. Since the Quakers were friendly to Dickinson, and since many non-Quakers were not certain to what extreme Dickinson would go, all determined to meet and send a friendly letter to Boston, forward a letter to the southern

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[24]See item 34, this chapter, pp. 54-63.

colonies, and try to call a general Congress of representatives of all the colonies. As a safety valve, the Pennsylvania Assembly would be called if feelings ran high at this meeting of Philadelphians.

In the "smoke-filled room" fashion, it was decided that Dickinson's friend, who was considered a rash man, should offer severe measures, and Dickinson would then offer moderate measures. /Thomas/ Mifflin and /Joseph?/ Reed were approached with the above procedure in mind and were invited to dine with Dickinson on the day of the meeting. Though Dickinson offered excuses for not attending he assented, at last, to go. At the meeting (at which Thomson was also in attendance) Thomson noted some reluctance in one /probably Dickinson/ so he suggested that Reed open the meeting, Mifflin second him, Thomson then speak, Dickinson follow Thomson, and after this they each speak as occasion offered itself. Both Reed and Mifflin wanted Thomson to bring Dickinson to the meeting, to which Thomson assented.

In the meeting[25] Reed spoke with "tempre, moderation but in pathetic terms," after the letter from Boston had been read. Mifflin spoke next "with more warmth and fire." Thomson was next and pressed for an immediate "declaration in favor of Boston" but

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[25]In this letter dates have been omitted, but it is almost certain that the meeting detailed in this letter is another account of the public meeting of May 20, 1774, referred to in Thomson's letter of November 4, 1786, to Doctor David Ramsay. See item 34, this chapter, pp. 54-63.

due to lack of sleep and the heat of the room Thomson fainted and was carried out. Dickinson then addressed the meeting in a manner unknown to Thomson (who was, of course, out of the room). After Dickinson spoke, a clamor was heard and confusion reigned. When Thomson returned to the room he moved that an answer be returned to Boston. This carried and a committee was appointed to carry this out. Since differing opinions were represented, two lists of persons were suggested for the committee, and eventually both the lists were appointed. The committee then wrote the letter to Boston, informed the southern colonies, and called for a general Congress to meet.

The next step was the calling of a general meeting of the inhabitants of Philadelphia in such a way as to secure the attendance and thus the cooperation of the Quakers. This was successfully done, and the Quakers contributed to the meeting, which had as presidents Dickinson, Willing, and /Edward/ Pennington, and as speakers Smith, Reed, and Thomson, who were to write down their remarks so the presidents could read them beforehand. The meeting was held[26] and several resolutions were passed. It was decided, in the meantime, to call on the Governor to call the Assembly.[27] The Governor refused to call the

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[26]This must have been the meeting of June 18, 1774, referred to in Thomson's letter to Ramsay. See item 34, this chapter, pp. 54-63.

[27]A petition was presented to the Governor on June 8, 1774.

legislature immediately, but in a few days the Assembly was called because of an Indian dispute in the colony. His earlier refusal to call the Assembly was not disagreeable to the Philadelphians, for they did not trust the Assembly members anyway. Since an economic dispute over the East India Company was the central issue, and since the merchants had dropped the dispute on previous occasions when interest waned, the leaders at this time determined to take the cause to all the people and thus by-pass the merchants. Consequently, committees in every county of Pennsylvania were appointed and were called to meet in Philadelphia. Dickinson was consulted in all of these measures and heartily took part in the preparations for the meeting of county committees. After the general meeting of Philadelphians, Dickinson, Mifflin, and Thomson travelled to the frontier counties in order "to discover the sentiments of the inhabitants & particularly of the Germans."

Next, the Convention of Committees met at Philadelphia prior to the Assembly; the grievances drawn up by Dickinson were accepted and presented to the Assembly in the form of instructions in order to get the Assembly to work in cooperation with other colonial assemblies. The Convention also pressed the Assembly to appoint delegates to a general congress of all the colonies. The Assembly did so but confined the delegates to members of the

Assembly thus eliminating Dickinson and [James] Wilson, both of whom the Convention wished elected. But on October 1, Dickinson was elected to the Assembly and added to the list of delegates.

In the Assembly Dickinson proved to be an energetic representative. He was appointed to a committee to prepare an address to the people of Canada, and he was added to a committee previously appointed to revise the petition to the King, the first petition being unacceptable to the Assembly. During the winter sessions he took every opportunity to alert Assembly members to the dangers that threatened the colonists; in this he was supported by, among others, Mifflin, [Edward] Biddle, [George] Ross, and Thomson, who were in the Assembly. This "alerting" action of Dickinson's called for great delicacy, for the majority in the Assembly were either Proprietary or Quaker members, and a danger existed of uniting these two into a powerful party. Thomson pointed out to Drayton that Pennsylvania was a cautious colony until committed to some cause, when she would then be resolute. Furthermore, great numbers in Pennsylvania were German, who were under the influence of Quakers. "For this reason," Thomson stated, "it was necessary to act with more caution and by every prudent means, to obtain their [German and Quaker] concurrence in the opposition to the designs of Great Britain. . . ."

With the skirmish at Lexington, war appeared imminent. Many of the Assembly had held their seat in the legislature over

a long period and wished to continue in the Assembly. Thomson and others wished to keep these established members moving further for the "cause of America" and eventually get them so far that they could not retreat. In the winter of 1775 the Assembly agreed to purchase ammunition; the next summer, though a majority were Quakers, the Assembly consented to arm the population and therefore ordered five thousand muskets with bayonets. Since the colonial treasury would not meet this expenditure, the Assembly voted £ 35,000 "to be struck in bills of credit and pledged the faith of the Province for the redemption of it. . . ."

Thomson digressed at this point to explain how the constitution of Pennsylvania was well-suited for this action. The Assembly met annually. Elections were assured, for any freemen "worth £50" could vote for representatives to the Assembly, sheriff, coroner, commissioners for the county, and assessors for the county. Members of the House (or Assembly) met on a certain day and chose its own speaker, provincial treasurer, and other officers. The House "sat on its own adjournment" and the governor could not prorogue or dissolve it. All of this strengthened Pennsylvania, for she could keep her government intact during the Revolutionary War and not have to have a Convention for a government.

In Pennsylvania, to return to the narrative, apparently everything was proceeding in suitable fashion for the patriots,

who were gaining ground in the Assembly. But an unexpected setback from a source expected to be the strongest support staggered the patriots. The Committee of Philadelphia (elected for the purpose of executing and over-seeing the non-importation agreement recommended by Congress in 1774) of which Reed was President (or chairman) was increased to one hundred members in order to give the group added influence. Many now on the Committee demanded immediate action and attributed the cautious approach of the patriots in Assembly to a lukewarm attitude for the colonial cause. So instead of driving towards colonial unity, the Committee drove wedges in possible party cooperation just when the Assembly was curbing the governor's power. The committee next voted for a state Convention for the legal government,[28] and appointed a special committee to devise the means of getting the other county committees to consent to a Convention. Dickinson, Mifflin, and Thomson, who were members of the Congress, Assembly, and the Committee, headed off this move toward a Convention.

Lexington and the battle of Bunker Hill brought the necessity for an army and a commander-in-chief. Also, a declaration seemed necessary to justify Americans carrying arms against Great Britain. Dickinson, who still sought reconciliation with Great

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[28]The resolution the Committee passed is found in Harley, Life, pp. 78-9.

Britain, wanted to send another petition to the King. Being encouraged in this endeavor by others, he drew up a petition and a declaration and sent both to England. In the debates over the subject matter of these two documents[29] Dickinson "took a distinguished part." These papers were valuable for showing the people of Pennsylvania that such action, though it did little or no good, was at least attempted.

At the annual election of October, 1775, changes were recorded in the membership of the Assembly; new members included Reed.[30] Since the Governor had withdrawn himself "in a great degree from the affairs of Government," the Assembly, at the first meeting following elections, appointed a "Council or Committee of Safety and invested them with the executive powers of government, reserving to themselves the legislative authority, which they exercised by resolves."

In November the Assembly returned to Congress, among others, Mr. [Thomas] Willing, a judge of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and Mr. [Andrew] Allen, the attorney-general of Pennsylvania and brother-in-law of the Governor. The only divisive element left in the province was a few of the most rigid Quakers "who kept

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[29]This action must have taken place in the Assembly.

[30]In Collections, p. 285, it is incorrectly stated that "Mr D", instead of Reed, was newly elected. In the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, II, p. 423, it is correctly written as "Mr Reed."

aloof and refused to be concerned in elections for Assemblymen, under pretence that their religious principles forbad them countenancing war." But the discipline of their elders and the church could not dissuade many of the younger Quakers from participation in the war effort. Thomson concluded by suggesting that a distinction between offensive and defensive war, which was made at that time, could have been employed to render Quaker opposition harmless.

## CHAPTER IV

## AVOCATIONAL INTERESTS

### A. SCIENTIFIC INTERESTS

1

(From Collections, pp. 198-200; Boyd, Papers, VIII, pp. 15-17; a fragment of this letter is found in Harley, Life, p. 145.) New York, March 6, 1785. To Thomas Jefferson [Paris].

Thomson was responding to a letter of November 11, 1784, from Thomas Jefferson, in which Jefferson had sent a pamphlet which discredited the theory of animal magnetism (that a fluid pervaded all nature and was capable of being collected, and where it was collected it could produce wondrous effects) which was sweeping Europe and making inroads in the United States. Thomson mentioned that de la Fayette had lectured on this subject at the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, as one of Mesmer's ["discoverer" of animal magnetism] scholars. Thomson had wondered if the Shakers of Pennsylvania could have "by some means stumbled upon the discovery of animal magnetism," but he was glad to find out the entire theory was not true.

Jefferson had also mentioned some new lamps in France, equal to eight candles in brightness, as well as new phosphoretic matches. Thomson replied that he had access to the matches in America but would like to have one of the lamps.

In response to Jefferson's question whether Thomson would like to be a subscriber to the new Encyclopedie Methodique,

Thomson said that his duties in office required all his time and he would have little time for science.

Thomson was happy at John Jay's taking the Secretary of Foreign Affairs office.

And, finally, he wished that Jefferson would print his (Jefferson's) "Notes on the State of Virginia in Answer to Queries," though Thomson would like it called, "A Natural History of Virginia." Whatever the title, Thomson considered it one of the best natural histories about part of America by an American.

2

(From Collections, pp. 209-12; an extract is found in Harley, Life, pp. 145-48.) New York, July 6, 1786. To Thomas Jefferson [Paris].

Thomson acknowledged receipt of one of the new cylinder lamps which Jefferson had sent him from London [see above letter].

Jefferson had mentioned in his letter of April 22, 1786, the new steam power used in the grist mills in London. Jefferson knew of the steam boat invention in America and Thomson told him that the inventor had applied to several legislatures for exclusive right to make the boat for a "number of years."

Thomson mentioned a new invention in South Carolina that would raise a great quantity of water in a short time for either flooding rice fields or pumping flooded lands dry. Thomson was unfamiliar with the principle on which it worked.

The remainder (and largest part) of the letter dealt with some weather phenomena that Thomson had observed above the New York skies. On June 30, 1786, northern lights had appeared in white and reddish hues. The next evening, the northern lights appeared again along with a "luminous belt or stream of light, forming a great and regular bow from east to west." This lasted from 10:30 PM until 11:30 PM. The next day the weather was overcast, but sultry.

> About 9 o'clock [Thomson described] the sun broke out, and it seemed as if we should have a very hot day, but about noon there arise a dark, smoky [sic] vapour which covered the whole heavens, sometimes so thick as to make it appear like a great ball of fire or a dark red full moon. This smoky vapour lasted the whole day, & in the evening there was a smell very much like that from burning green brush wood. Next day the vapour continued, but in a much less degree.

Two thunder storms followed and cleared the atmosphere, both of the vapor and the northern lights.

Thomson mentioned his recent thinking on the Deluge [Noah's flood of the Old Testament] and asked Jefferson's opinion on a recent work by Whitehurst about the Deluge. Thomson also asked for Jefferson's opinion about the effects of changing the position of the earth, either in inclination or in orbit.

Thomson had read "with much pleasure" two papers on the transportation of flour and on contraband.

3

(From Collections, pp. 213-13.) New York, July 30, 1786. To Thomas Jefferson [Paris].

Thomson, in responding to a letter of Jefferson's of May 10, 1786, said that he (Thomson) would "with pleasure honor the draught of Mr. Watson or Mrs. Eveleigh, and take care of and forward the seeds and plants as you desire." This reminded Thomson of an incident in transferring seeds from one country to another. The late Duke of Argyle /in England/ had been interested in gardening and had a ship captain scrape off one-quarter of an inch of American soil and put it into a hogshead for the Duke. The Duke then spread the soil one-quarter inch deep and plants grew which English botanists could not identify.

4

(From Collections, pp. 240-41; Boyd, Papers, XI, pp. 323-24.) New York, April 28, 1787. To Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson had written on May 10, 1786, that a botanical friend of his had written to Charlestown for some plants and seeds to be sent to Thomson and then forwarded to Jefferson. Thomson had heard no more about this until April 27, 1787, when a Captain Latham brought Thomson a letter and an invoice of which Thomson included a copy (for Jefferson). Thomson then sent immediately to the French Consul to see if the packet had left, which it had. Though he had to leave town, Thomson assured Jefferson that the seeds would be sent immediately.

Thomson was sorry to hear of Jefferson's "misfortune"; he mentioned Jefferson's wrist, so it must have been injured.

Thomson had referred Jefferson to some enlightening reading by Mr. Whitehurst, on the Deluge.[1] In this letter Thomson assured Jefferson that this author should not be one on which one should build his faith. But Whitehurst did have some original thoughts on this subject, as well as on the "present appearances and irregularities on the face of our globe." The mention of topography aroused the problem of the western part of the United States: why was it so "horizontal"? Even the Geographer General, Mr. Hutchins, could not answer that question. Some gentleman who was at that time (1787) in the western part of the United States had heard a tradition that the Mexicans came from the "northward about the 10th century," and claimed, from relic evidence, that the country bordering on the Ohio was the place from which they migrated. Thomson included an extract of a letter from this gentleman.

5

(From Collections, pp. 241-42; Boyd, Papers, XI, p. 403.) Philadelphia, June 6, 1787. To Thomas Jefferson /Paris/.

Thomson was in Philadelphia on business and was visited by Mr. J. Churchman, who claimed to have made an important new discovery for navigation. He had discovered "an easy & certain mode of ascertaining the longitude, by what is commonly called

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[1] See item 2, this chapter, pp. 82-3.

the variation of the compass." Since Thomson felt inadequate in this field, he referred the gentleman to others more informed than himself in these matters.

Churchman wished Jefferson to see and consider this, so Thomson was requested to forward "the letter and piece he means to send you . . ." which Thomson did.

B. RELIGIOUS INTERESTS

6

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 477.) No city given, October 9, 1786. To Reverend John Ettwein.

Thomson sent this letter by Mr. James White, who had been a delegate to Congress from North Carolina and had recently been appointed "Superintendant of Indian affairs for the southern district which includes all the Indians Southard [sic] of the Ohio." Thomson felt that White might be cooperative towards endeavors to carry the Gospel to the Indians in this southern district, and had had a conversation with White to this end. Since White was agreeable to this cooperation, Thomson was writing to introduce White and suggest that White and Reverend Ettwein meet and discuss this possibility.

Thomson closed by asking to be remembered to the Reverend Baron de Watteville and his wife.

7

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 485.) New York, October 13, 1786. To Reverend John Ettwein.

Thomson recalled his letter of October 9, 1786, [see above letter] which included an introduction to and recommendation of James White. Thomson had also talked with "general Richard Butler who is appointed Superintend't of Indian affairs for the northern district which includes all the Indian nations in the territory of the U S northward of the Ohio and westward of Hudson river." Since the Brethren Indian congregation lay within this area, Thomson recommended this congregation and their teacher, David Zeisberger, to Butler, who had assured Thomson of his cooperation to the missionary work.

Thomson concluded with an expression of his happiness in being able to help "these poor . . . whose condition and situation I most sincerely commiserate."

8

(From Harley, Life, pp. 163, 165.) No city given, January 6, 1801. To Rev. Samuel Miller.

[These are only two extracts of the entire letter.]

Thomson's translation of the Septuagint had occupied Thomson's attention for more than twelve years, he told Miller. In this translation Thomson followed no rigid system or interpretation, but rather he sought a "just and true representation of the sense and meaning of the Sacred Scriptures" and he tried to retain the "spirit and manner of the authors. . . ."

Thomson had made four copies of his translation and was now completing the fifth copy.

9

(From Harley, Life, p. 165.) No city given, 1808. To Thomas Jefferson.

[This is an extract of the entire letter.]

Thomson was thankful to Providence that he had been enabled to finish his translation [see above letter]. It kept his mind occupied so that during the past nine years not one hour hung heavily on him.

10

(From Collections, pp. 260-61.) No city given, February 4, 1809. To an unidentified person.

Thomson thanked this person for the copy of the "Documents" which he had sent him.

Thomson felt he had so important a part in the struggle for independence that he could not be indifferent to its preservation. He hoped that the same kind Providence that guided them through the struggle would continue to do so.

He sent the three volumes of his translation of the Septuagint [see above two letters], including a ground plot of Solomon's Temple, which he thought was essentially correct. The fourth and last volume of the translation was nearly ready.

C. OTHER INTERESTS

11

(From Collections, pp. 18-20.) Philadelphia, November 6, 1768. To Benjamin Franklin [London].

Thomson expressed regret at the lack of correspondence between the two of them, and hoped that even though "some, who of late have taken it into their head to be dissatisfied with Thomson" that Franklin was not counted among them.

Thomson wrote, primarily, of a Society formed in 1750 to which Thomson belonged; the Society was about dissolved so he was trying to revive and enlarge it. He had published the "proposals" [probably aims and ideals] of the Society [which he sent in the letter but are not published] and after some initial difficulties had established correspondence with most of the colonies, including some of the island colonies. Members were elected, among them being Benjamin Franklin; Franklin's son and a Doctor Evans were designated to inform Franklin that he had been elected president; Mr. Samuel Powell, vice-president; Doctor Morgan, Major Nicole, and John Bartram, curators; Mr. Biddle, treasurer; and Mr. Thomas Mifflin and Charles Thomson, secretaries. Thomson hoped that Franklin would accept his new office of president.[2]

12

(From Boyd, Papers, VI, pp. 163-64.) Philadelphia, March 9, 1762. To Thomas Jefferson.

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[2]By reviving and enlarging this Society, Thomson was, in reality, spearheading a move to merge the American Society and the American Philosophical Society. (Zimmerman, "Thomson," pp. 473-74.) The Pennsylvania Gazette, January 12, 1769, described the meeting of January 2, 1769, at which time Franklin was elected president of the group. Since this letter of November 6, 1768, preceded the meeting of January 2, 1769, the dateline of the letter may be incorrect.

Thomson, in answer to Jefferson's letter of December 20, 1781, confessed his ignorance as to the duties of a "counsellor of the American philosophical society," even though he (Thomson) had been "honored with that appointment."

Thomson was of some help in relating the aim of the society:

> it has for its object the improvement of useful knowledge more particularly what relates to this new world. It comprehends the whole circle of arts, science and discoveries especially in the natural world. . . .

Thomson eulogized America and her people by pointing out the abundant natural resources, the fertile soil which would probably support all Asian plants, and a people ready to apply themselves to "useful arts and inventions." The government was as yet, however, "unformed" and was "capable of great improvements in police, finance and commerce." The history of the "aborigines," as well as a "thousand other subjects" were unexplored. Thomson expressed regret at Jefferson's "retiring from the busy anxious scenes of politics," even though it would leave Jefferson time for "philosophical researches."

## CHAPTER V

## VOCATIONAL AND PERSONAL LETTERS

### A. INDIAN AFFAIRS[1]

1

(From Harley, Life, p. 47.) No city given, July 28, 1757. To Samuel Rhoads.

[This is an extract of the entire letter.]

Thomson, in speaking of a conference between Indians led by Teedyuscung and whites [in Pennsylvania], said thousands of lives depend upon the outcome of the conference, so it necessitated sober minds to conduct the business. But instead of soberness, drunkenness for the Indians was encouraged by the white man's liquor. The first few days were spent in debating whether the King [Teedyuscung] should have a clerk; the King won, but the white men determined he would be unfit "to say anything worthy of being minuted by his own secretary," so a bonfire and liquor followed for all the Indians.

2

(From Pennsylvania Archives, First Series, III, Philadelphia, 1853, p. 256; Harley, Life, p. 48.) Easton [Pennsylvania], August 4, 1757. To Governor William Denny [governor of Pennsylvania].

Charles Thomson had been appointed by Teedyuscung "to take the Minutes of the Treaty with his & the Indian now in this Town."

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[1] See items 6 and 7, Chapter IV, pp. 86-7, for other letters regarding the Indians.

Thomson wanted Governor Denny to know that before being so appointed he (Thomson) had read some of the former Indian treaties and made notes from them. He noticed that in a Treaty of 1728 there was entered a deed from the Indians, dated 1718, which was "acknowledged & ratified by the Indians, & the Boundaries ascertained more particularly than before." After Thomson had examined the deeds sent him by Denny he noticed that this deed of 1718 was not among the treaties. He concluded:

> having a printed Copy of the said Deed & Treaty in my Custory [sic], I could not, consistent with my Duty under my present Circumstances, nor the concern I have for the Honour of his Majesty, King George, & the real interest of this Province, omit thus submitting the Premises to your Honour's Consideration.

3

(From Pennsylvania Archives, First Series, III, p. 423.)
Fort Allen, June 10, 1758. To Richard Peters.

[This is an extract of the entire letter.]

Thomson wrote of the movement of an unnamed Indian party of about seventy-eight. The information of the movements of the party was brought to the fort by the wife of Gabriel Locquies [also spelled as "Lacquies" in the letter], who had been visited by two Indian men. These two Indians also told Locquies that a Joseph Croker had been killed by a party of "Shawnese."

Thomson related that five Indians were being held in Fort Allen, and were being moved (evidently to the south and probably to Philadelphia). Two of the five were to proceed ahead of Thomson

and the remainder of the unnamed party were to serve as scouts. If anything amiss was encountered one was to return to the party and tell of it; if nothing happened the two would proceed as rapidly as possible, the others coming more leisurely.

Thomson wanted Peters to tell the "Secretary" of this but he (Thomson) would himself write the governor about it.

4

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 514-15.) New York, December 4, 1786. To Reverend John Ettwein.

It gave Thomson "great pain" to hear that the Indian Congregation faced suffering because of lack of food. Thomson, after receiving this news from Ettwein, went to the secretary of war who informed Thomson that "after the passing of the resolution of which I sent /Ettwein/ a copy in a former letter, he (the secretary) dispatched orders to Col. Harmar to deliver to them on their application the 500 bushels of Corn and other articles mentioned in the resolution." Thomson suggested that the Indians apply for this corn to either Colonel Harmar or the Superintendent or his deputy at Pittsburgh.

Thomson hoped that the proposed massacre was an unfounded rumor and that the bitterness of the frontier whitemen against the Indians would be removed. If the Indian Congregation decided to move from Cayaoga to Muskingum, Colonel Harmar would cooperate fully.

5

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, pp. 715-16.) New York, April 11, 1788. To Arthur St. Clair /President of Congress/.

Upon his arrival in New York, Thomson found letters from Mr. John Etwein /Ettwein/ for both St. Clair and Thomson. Etwein told Thomson that the letter for St. Clair was from agents for the "Missions of the United brethren, in behalf of the remains of the Christian Indians who were drived from Muskingum." Thomson was sure that the agent would not plead in vain, knowing St. Clair's "humanity." Thomson continued, pointing out that it may not be wise to try to "quiet the minds of the Delaware" in respect to the slaughter of their friends and relatives on the Muskingum or to "remove from their thoughts every idea of its being a measure of Government." Instead, it might be better, in case they complained, to inform them how much Congress disapproved of this act, and what discontent it gave Congress "that the Nations who were at war with us should have been the cause or given pretext for the detested deed, by opening a war path through the towns of those innocent people and previously removing them to Sandusky."

Thomson closed by wishing St. Clair success in his negotiations and happiness in the administration of his government.

B. COMMERCIAL LETTERS

6

(From Collections, pp. 5-6.) Philadelphia, November 7, 1765. To Messrs. Welsh, Wilkinson and Company /London/.

Thomson sent a note of G. Russel (drawn on another Mr. Russel) for £ 100 to be posted to Thomson's credit. He wrote of the confusion created by the Stamp Act: the non-importation agreement among the merchants of the colonies would either stimulate manufacturing among the colonials or it would cause them to go without. Included in the letter was a form that told of a colonial measure to countermand any order a merchant had sent to London that had not yet been received by the colonial merchant. Thomson sent the form even though he had no order with this firm.

7

1765. (From Collections, p. 7.) Philadelphia, December 17, To Messrs. Sergeant, Anfere and Company [London].

Thomson sent a note of George Bryans for £ 200, which was drawn on Hansen-clever, Seton and Crofts; Thomson wished this note to be posted to his credit.

8

1766. (From Collections, pp. 14-15.) Philadelphia, May 20, To Messrs. Neale, Pigon and Booth [London].

In response to a letter that told of a large balance due this firm, Thomson sent three notes drawn by Carson, Barclay and Mitchell, two on Davis Harvey for £ 150 each and one on William Alexander for £ 200 which totalled £ 500. Thomson promised to discharge the remainder of the debt as quickly as possible, and thanked the firm for their help in the recent [Stamp Act] crisis. He expressed optimism because of the repeal of the Act.

## C. PERSONAL LETTERS[2]

9

(From Collections, p. 17.) Philadelphia, August 24, 1766. To Benjamin Franklin /London/.

Thomson wrote in behalf of a young medical student who was going to Edinburgh to continue his studies. This student, "Benj/amin/ R/ush/, a native of this town /Philadelphia/," was introduced to Thomson by Doctor J. Redman. Rush wished to be under the patronage of Franklin and hoped to be introduced "to the notice of men of Letters," especially physicians.

Thomson called to Franklin's attention that Rush was accompanied by Jonathan Potts, son of John Potts, an old friend of Franklin.

10

(From Burnett, Letters, VI, p. 374.) No city given, June 24, 1782. To William Barton /Massachusetts/.

Thomson was "much obliged for the perusal of the elements of Haraldry which I now return. I have just dipt into it so far as to be satisfied that it may afford a fund of entertainment and may be applied by a State to useful purposes." Thomson also thanked Barton for a gift, Fortescue's "De Laudibus Legum Angliae," and said he would be happy to return the favor.

Thomson enclosed a copy of the seal of the United States which Barton had drawn, and which Congress had accepted.

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[2]For other letters of this nature, see items 11 and 30, Chapter III, pp. 29-30 and 50-51.

11

(From Harley, Life, pp. 211-12.) Philadelphia, June 19, 1784. To Issac Norris [Paris].

Thomson was pleased to hear of Norris' safe arrival in Paris and of his reception with the American ministers. He expected Norris to conduct himself in such a way that would do honor to Thomson's recommendation. With the choice of virtue or pleasure before him, and, like Hercules, the opportunity to take either path, Norris would, Thomson hoped, "make the glorious choice."

He told Norris of Jefferson to whom Thomson had recommended Norris, and hoped that he would cultivate Jefferson's friendship, as well as that of all the American ministers in Paris.

12

(From Harley, Life, p. 201.) Philadelphia, June 19, 1784. To John Jay [Paris].

[This is an extract of the entire letter.]

Writing of Isaac Norris [see above letter] Thomson related that Norris lost his father and his uncle, so he had "suffered in his education." Thomson wished that Norris would have remained longer in America before going abroad, but now that he had gone to Paris, he, by Jay's advice would, perhaps, make "the choice of Hercules." If he did make poor decisions, Thomson hoped Jay would encourage him to return to America.

13

(From Collections, p. 195; Boyd, Papers, VII, p. 453.) Philadelphia, October 26, 1784. To Thomas Jefferson [Paris].

Thomson was now recommending Isaac Norris' brother, Joseph, to the care of Thomas Jefferson while Joseph was in Paris [see above two letters]. Joseph Norris was interested in trade and had gone to Europe to establish commercial connections. He wished to visit Paris, though, for tourist reasons, as well.

14

(From Burnett, Letters, VIII, p. 485.) New York, October 13, 1786. To Richard Butler.

Thomson asked Butler to forward an enclosed letter for Reverend John Ettwein. Thomson suggested that it could be sent either to Mr. Daniel Benezet or to the Moravian House on Race Street in Philadelphia, either of which would forward it to Reverend Ettwein.

15

(From Collections, pp. 213-15; Boyd, Papers, IX, p. 9.) New York, November 2, 1786. To Thomas Jefferson [Paris].

Thomson, in this letter, responded to a written work sent by its author, Thomas Jefferson, who had expressed apprehension about the way some southerners would greet some of his remarks about slavery in the South. Thomson shared Jefferson's apprehension and remarked:

> This [slavery] is a cancer that we must get rid of. It is a blot in our character that must be wiped out. If it

> cannot be done by religion, reason and philosophy, confident I am that it will one day be by blood. I confess I am more afraid of this than of the Algerine piracies, or the jealousy entertained of us by European powers of which we hear so much of late. However I have the satisfaction to find that philosophy is gaining ground of selfishness in this respect. If this can be rooted out and our land filled with Freemen, Union preserved, and the spirit of Liberty maintained and cherished, I think in 25 or 30 years we shall have nothing to fear from the rest of the world.

Thomson told Jefferson of Mr. Houdon going to Mount Vernon to take "the bust of our amiable General." Thomson, though confessing he was no art critic, was quite pleased with the results. Other news included the return of Benjamin Franklin [from London] and the honoring of Franklin "with the chair of President of Pensilva."

Thomson's duties, he related to Jefferson, were much enlarged, and consequently, he was kept quite busy.

16

(From Collections, pp. 264-68; an extract is found in Harley, Life, pp. 204-5.) Lower Merion, near Philadelphia, May 16, 1816. To Thomas Jefferson.

Thomson thanked Jefferson for the book Jefferson wrote, "Philosophy of Jesus," which "is to you a document in proof that you are a real Christian."

Thomson described his health: he was near 88 years of age and ill at times, but he miraculously recovered when near death. His present condition was none too good: most of his teeth were gone; his eyes were good, although he almost lost the use of them in 1778; his hearing was dull; his memory was weak; but he was

free from "gout or stone or any acute disorder"; he could sleep well; and he could still read (he had recently read "Allen's History of Lewis and Clark's interesting expedition. . .").

Thomson informed Jefferson that he had used the "flesh brush" from an early age; it served "instead of riding, and I have the benefit of an air bath instead of a water bath."

17

(From Collections, pp. 226-27.) No city given, no date given. To Thomas Jefferson.

Since Jefferson's last letter to Thomson, Thomson had suffered a paralytic stroke. He could read but not comprehend; he could not even remember names of his own family. Another stroke followed which further limited him; he could not talk, and had no appetite. His recovery came as suddenly as his stroke and he had progressed nicely.

Thomson told how he had defended Jefferson from some attack of Mr. Delaplaine on Jefferson for his (Jefferson's) supposed infidel beliefs. Thomson finally produced evidence (by referring Delaplaine to Jefferson's book on the philosophy of Jesus) that Jefferson was a Christian. He assured Jefferson that he remained a loyal friend.

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