

## *A Pennsylvania Farmer at the Court of King George*

*John Dickinson's London Letters, 1754-1756*

LONDON was a politically exciting town in 1755 and 1756. Henry Pelham, who had brought an unusual stability to British politics during the last eleven years of his life, had died in March, 1755. His unexpected passing signaled the end of an era, and, as John Dickinson recorded, led to a lively general election. It took six months for the House of Commons to settle the disputed returns. The new ministry was unfortunately headed by Pelham's brother, the Duke of Newcastle, a man of few talents who confused administration with statesmanship. Newcastle loved power but hated to make decisions, possibly because so many of his decisions were wrong. He decided, for example, that the incompetent Sir Thomas Robinson could lead the House of Commons, thus leaving two brilliant and ambitious men free to attack an extraordinarily vulnerable government: Henry Fox and William Pitt could not be left out in the political cold together. By September, 1755, however, Fox had supplanted Robinson.

The problems facing Newcastle's stumbling ministry were indeed formidable. While the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle officially ended King George's War in America (and the War of the Austrian Succession in Europe), in reality 1748 only marked the beginning of a six-year truce. In the New World, the French at once began jockeying for position, constructing forts inside Nova Scotia's border and in the vast Ohio country. With English colonists surging across the Alleghenies, clashes were inevitable.

Newcastle's ministry was sadly divided over American policy, and the result was an enormously ambitious military program with virtually no provision for its implementation. The need for colonial union against the French was widely acknowledged, but Newcastle

felt too insecure to challenge the status quo. He found it easier to accept the advice of the Duke of Cumberland, George II's favorite son, and send General Edward Braddock to secure the Ohio Valley from the French; at the same time, he was assuring Versailles that this was only a peace measure.

In fairness to Newcastle, it must be remembered that he served a Hanoverian master. He had to show a decent concern for the security of Hanover as well as for more vital British interests in America and India. Here his task was complicated by diplomatic developments only imperfectly understood in England. The British performance in the recent War for the Austrian Succession had not impressed the bruised and battered Austrians, and they were now less inclined to gaze upon the French with hostile eyes. Prince Kaunitz, the Austrian chancellor, contended that the chief threat to Austria was in Berlin rather than Versailles. The upstart Prussians still retained Austrian Silesia and jeopardized Austria's traditional supremacy in German affairs. For Kaunitz there was no question but that France would make a more valuable ally in future Continental campaigns than an empire-minded Britain. Thus, when Britain concluded a mutual defense pact with Prussia for the protection of Hanover, Kaunitz was ready to persuade the startled French to enter into a diplomatic marriage with Austria. Since the Russians subsequently joined the Franco-Austrian combination, England looked rather lonely on the eve of the Seven Years' War.

Diplomatic miscalculation was matched by military mistakes. Newcastle was no war minister. In 1755, General Braddock marched to his death in western Pennsylvania. By 1756, the government was in mortal fear of a French invasion and so retained forces at home which, with better intelligence, might have saved Minorca, the actual target of France's European aggression against England. William Pitt (who, in June, 1756, appeared to Dickinson as no more than "a discontented statesman . . . the patriot of the times") tried for a national militia, only to be defeated by the House of Lords. The parliamentary debates on this familiar issue afforded Dickinson a lively review of the dangers of standing armies and foreign mercenaries. Despite overt hostilities, England did not formally declare war on France until May 15, 1756, after the attack on Minorca left little choice.

Ministerial fumbling was not the whole story. George II had not helped matters any by insisting on visiting his beloved Hanover during six critical months in 1755, thus precipitating a regency crisis reminiscent of the one four years earlier when Frederick, Prince of Wales, had died unexpectedly. The general political atmosphere was one of drift and indecision, which is admirably conveyed in Dickinson's letters. Indeed, there was little improvement until William Pitt finally picked up the reins in November, 1756.

Unhappily, similar criticism can be leveled against the American colonies during this period. While many colonists insisted that the 1754 Albany Plan of Union required initial action from Parliament, not one colonial assembly nudged Newcastle to support the proposals. Most colonies seemed more concerned with internal disputes than with the French threat. Pennsylvania, as Dickinson noted with regret, was deeply divided over currency, taxes, and the authority of the Penns. The bitterly fought contest between Assembly and governor reflected little credit on either. The Assembly insisted on framing legislation which called for bills of credit funded by a tax on property, including previously exempt proprietary estates. Obeying Thomas Penn's instructions, Governor Robert Morris blocked the Assembly's efforts. Both sides appealed to the Board of Trade, and Penn was substantially sustained. But, as Dickinson phrased it, neither side had "any great reason to boast." Only in the face of fresh Indian onslaughts did the Assembly finally withdraw its insistence on taxing the Penn properties, Penn agreeing to make a "gift" of £5,000 toward defense costs. It is not surprising that Dickinson should on the one hand condemn the management of "public affairs" in England, and on the other grieve over "the double miseries of war & discord" afflicting Pennsylvania.

Dickinson's political education progressed rapidly during the last years of his London residence. Although the lessons he learned have an obvious relevance to his later career, his dispassionate approach to politics seems particularly significant. Dickinson, like his admired Lord Bolingbroke, disliked party and faction, and wished to be identified with neither. "How soon do men lose sight of publick good when under the influence of private passion," he exclaimed to his mother in August, 1756. "Which side," he continued, "shall an honest man espouse where both are in the wrong?" Like Jefferson,

Dickinson did not want his heart to run away with his head. "A good man," he remarked on his political debut in 1764, "*ought* to serve his country, even though she *resents* his services."

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## PART II

[January 21, 1755]

[Honoured Father,]

. . . Mr. Penn desird me to make some enquiries about Taylors & Sharp's islands—what counties they were in—& was much pleasd with my answers. He told me he was reviewing the dispute with Ld Baltimore, to which those questions were previous.<sup>1</sup> He gave me a very kind invitation to visit him at his country seat at Maidenhead.

I am infinitely oblidgd to my most Honourd Father for his kind compliance with my request to stay a little longer in England than was at first designd. . . . My mind was before so filld with a sense of your great favours that it is not possible to give it my additional impulse to enforce my duty, and such a profusion of tenderness must certainly make me a bankrupt in gratitude. I have been some time past employd in reading, but Hillary Term coming on the 23rd of this month, I shall run down to Westminster Hall every morning by 9 oclock & shiver in that great open place till 2 or three.

The Parliament is now setting, but the Ministry seems to be very unsettled since Mr. Pelhams death. The Duke of New Castle has a great party in the House & yet manages as Prime Minister. But he & his brother disoblidg the Princess of Wales & the Duke of Cumberland, the first by restraining her too much in the Act of Settlement on the Prince of Wales death, and the other by concluding the war when he was at the head of a fine army & flush with the hopes of glory, so that it is said they favour a party formd by the Duke of

<sup>1</sup> Taylor's and Sharp's islands are situated along the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay, in Dorchester and Talbot counties, respectively. The Penns had been engaged in a lengthy dispute with the Baltimores over the Pennsylvania-Maryland border. An initial agreement was reached in 1732, but a final legal decision was delayed until Chancellor Hardwicke's verdict for Thomas Penn in 1750. Even so, Penn had to wait another ten years for the sixth Lord Baltimore to accept this decision, and another seven years for the surveys and boundary markers to be completed. See *Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series*, VII, 321-425, and XVI.

Bedford, Duke of Marlborough & Mr. Fox.<sup>2</sup> The Parliament have just done the common & necessary business that could not be delayed, but I believe most of the gentlemen in that House would be glad to know to whom to bow. Restless ambition harrasses all the great, who destroy all the real means of happiness actually in their power & are truly miserable through the very desire to avoid it.

There are above seventy controverted elections this Parliament, one of the greatest proofs perhaps of the corruption of the age that can be mentioned. Bribery is so common that it is that there is not a borough in England where it is not practised, & it is certain that many very flourishing ones are ruined, their manufactories decayed & their trade gone by their dependance on what they get by their votes. We hear every day in Westminster Hall leave moved to file informations for bribery, but it is ridiculous & absurd to pretend to curb the effects of luxury & corruption in one instance or in one spot without a general reformation of manners, which every one sees is absolutely necessary for the welfare of this kingdom. Yet Heaven knows how it can be effected. It is grown a vice here to be virtuous. We have a maxim in the law that "The people is unhappy where the laws are unsettled." But I think with much more truth it may be said, "when religion is unsettled," which Great Britain wretchedly experiences at this time. People are grown too polite to have an old fashioned religion, & are too weak to find out a new, from whence follows the most unbounded licentiousness & utter disregard of virtue which is

<sup>2</sup> As of 1755, the Newcastle ministry was in difficulties but no real danger. William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1721-1765), George II's only surviving son, had not opposed the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, but was now identified with the war party. With George II planning to depart for Hanover, there was a squabble over the regency; over the opposition of Newcastle, the Duke of Cumberland was made sole regent in the King's absence. The Princess Augusta (widow of Frederick, Prince of Wales, and ambitious mother of the future George III) felt that she should have received the designation. Apart from distaste for Newcastle, the Princess Augusta and the Duke of Cumberland had little in common. John Russell (1710-1771), 4th Duke of Bedford, was married to a sister of the Duke of Marlborough; Russell, who was First Lord of the Admiralty, 1744-1748, and Lord Privy Seal, 1761-1763, was fiercely anti-Newcastle. Charles Spencer (1706-1758), 3rd Duke of Marlborough and 5th Earl of Sunderland, was earlier identified with the Leicester House group (*i.e.*, the political opposition rallying around the Prince of Wales prior to 1751); he served as Steward of the Household from 1749 to 1755, when he became Lord Privy Seal. Henry Fox, one of Cumberland's strongest allies, had recently replaced Robinson as leader of the House and Secretary of State for the Southern Department. These men constituted the leadership of a group of factions critical of the Duke of Newcastle.

the unfailing cause of the destruction of all empires, for it is as impossible for publick dignity & security to exist w[ith]out private virtue & honesty as to build a strong & complete house at a single stroke which must be composd of many materials, put together with many hands, long time & great labour. . . .<sup>3</sup>

January 22, 1755

Honourd Mother,

Your favours of August 24th & October 30th I have recd & am very sorry I have had no opportunity of making any return for so long a time. But I have at length thrown Coke aside & begun a more pleasing employment. I read over & over that part of your letter which mentions your health being better than it has been for these ten years, & while I read it, I thought I saw my Honourd Mother in strength & spirits promising me the blessing of her dear converse these many years to come. But this salley of joy was soon checkd by a thousand fears. I know how much you always exposd yourself; I am afraid you will venture a little too much now. I should be extremely glad to know how this winter time agrees with you, & hope that the new kitchen was finishd before the cold weather set in, that you might not be obligd to go out as much as is usual.

With submission, I cannot be satisfied with the arguments ag[ains]t a white maid<sup>4</sup>—at least my Honourd Mother will permit a lawyer to altercate a little—I cannot bear to see with what ease the ladies here manage their families, while you have so much trouble. But their families are not such large ones as ours; for that very reason, there should be an assistant. Tis true London maids are not easily found in America; but there can be no damage in a trial, & there are very notable maids in Philada. I woud not have one taken out of Kent indeed, who is as proud as an empress because she is as poor as a

<sup>3</sup> Dickinson's comments on England's decadence, while occasioned by the 1754 elections, are phrased in language similar to Pulteney's in *The Craftsman* of July 29, 1727: "Corruption is a *Poison*, which will soon spread itself thro' all Ranks and Orders of Men; especially when it begins at the *Fountain-head*. A Spirit of Baseness, Prostitution and Venality will universally prevail. Luxury and Extravagance will introduce Want and Servility of Mind. . . ." Dickinson's letters reveal his familiarity with such sentiments, and such sources.

<sup>4</sup> In a letter to his mother on Mar. 29, 1754, Dickinson had commented: "I know the aversion you have to white maids, but I can't forbear thinking it possible to get some good sort of an elderly body who might ease you a good deal in the management of the family. . . ."

beggar. But a maid will find herself necessary & grow insolent—that, my Honour'd Mother's prudence will prevent; or if she does misbehave herself, she may be turn'd off. But that wo[ul]d be troublesome; to get a new one, more so; to turn her off too, & be constantly employ'd in doing & undoing, woud be worse than never changing.

I have rais'd objections which I believe I may venture to say never have happend, nor ever will. There are certainly such things as good nature & common sense in women, & such a station in our family is too considerable to be slightly thought of, or foolishly forfeited by the ridiculous dictates of ill nature. If I am wrong, permit my motive to plead my excuse, for I cannot be indifferent to any thing that concerns your ease & happiness.

I was highly entertain'd with the account of the charming evening on your seeing Capt. Hill. There cant be a worthier man. I am much oblig'd to Mr. Chew<sup>5</sup> for his kind & polite participation of your joy & for the goodness he was pleas'd to express towards me. I am glad you were able to form some idea of my situation, & to trace me to my elbow chair, envelop'd in Littleton<sup>6</sup> & Plowden. When I fix myself thoroughly & most quietly musing sometimes, I cant forbear smiling to think what tempests & wars are breeding in this calm; & tho the materials are so peaceably acquir'd, what an eruption there must hereafter be of noise, dispute & confusion. In all the treatises of philosophy I dont think there can be quoted effects so different from the *cause*, but notwithstanding, I am preparing for such busy & tumultuous scenes. Yet I promise myself the happiness of ease & retirement after all, tho this is not the greatest satisfaction I expect, for when I reflect on the ends & intent of my profession, & my particular designs in it, I declare with the utmost sincerity that on searching my heart, next to the gratifying my Honour'd Parents I find no consideration of equal weight with defending the innocent & redressing the injurd. That seems to me the noblest aim of human abilities & industry.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Chew studied at the Middle Temple, 1741–1743, after reading law in Andrew Hamilton's office. He succeeded Tench Francis as attorney general of Pennsylvania, 1755–1769, and in 1774 followed William Allen as chief justice of the province. See Burton Alva Konkle, *Benjamin Chew, 1722–1810* (Philadelphia, 1932).

<sup>6</sup> Sir Thomas Littleton (1422–1481) is best known for his *Tenures*, the study of property law on which Sir Edward Coke commented so extensively.

Many great men have laid it down as a maxim that no man can ever make a figure at the bar without proposing these things as the rewards of his labour. After supposing myself to have obtained all that wealth or fame can give, there still remains a void in the breast & I am ashamed of myself for having thought so meanly & sillily. They are agreeable, they may be necessary, but they ought to come in obliquely. I never can conceive that Divine Wisdom designed such mean partial objects for the motives of our actions

All praise is foreign but of true desert,  
Plays round the head, but comes not near the heart.<sup>7</sup>

Such praise I shall always desire, because I shall always desire to deserve it. And I was very much pleased with Mr. Hanbury's & Uncle Cadwalader's good opinion of me, for the applause of worthy men is an evidence of our having behaved well, of which one's own approbation is not sufficient proof.

My Honoured Mother, ever watchful for the happiness & reputation of her infinitely obliged son, is desirous of my obtaining the favour of some gentlemen here who have a large correspondence in Philadelphia. I am in the esteem of those gentlemen, I hope, but expect no great advantage for it; indeed, I don't think it in their power to serve me, for I should not choose my reputation to precede me least I should survive it. There is a disadvantage in having persons' opinions raised too high, & fame is so much more preposterous in our days than in Virgil's, "when she stood on the ground, & hid her head in the skies," that I have known her very strong & high in Philadelphia without the least foundation laid in London by the person of whom she was raised abroad. I will endeavour to behave so that no man shall be able to say any ill of me, & that is the most stable foundation that can be laid for a lasting credit.

Mrs. Holliday & her son arrived here after a long passage of ten weeks. They were both very ill all the way over, & she after coming ashore, but are now very well recovered, & growing daily better, as every one does by the English air, which is remarkably happy in that respect. I congratulated her & Mrs. Anderson in your name on

<sup>7</sup> From William Mason, *Musaeus, A Monody to the Memory of Mr. Pope, in Imitation of Milton's Lycidas* (London, 1747).



their meeting, & dind there with them last Christmas Day, at which time Mrs. Anderson always invites her countrymen.<sup>8</sup>

I have chosen my dear brother's cloaths & hope they will please him.<sup>9</sup> They are fashionable & very neat. As to the lining for the summer coat, white is not put into such light coloured cloth. I am very glad to hear he lodges with our dear & good uncle; he could not grow up in a better family. . . .

February 19, 1755

Honourd Father,

. . . I am very much obligd for the accounts you are so good as to give me of the state of the law. Laws in themselves certainly do not make men happy. They derive all their force & worth from a vigorous & just execution of them, & where there is any obstruction to this, from ignorance, villainy or cowardice, people are just in the same condition as if they had no laws, & the preserving the forms of judges, juries, sheriffs, or without knowledge, honesty & resolution, is like a mill which, after a material wheel is broken, may run giddily round but will never make a grain of flour. This I really believe to be the condition of our county at present, & I cant well see how it can be remedied unless they grow honester than they are, for suppose there were two lawyers of equal abilities—they never woud be a match unless they were equal rogues, too, for all the law of Coke & the eloquence of Cicero can never influence men who dont understand you, or if they do, were determind in their opinions before they heard you. I declare, I dont know whether to laugh or be angry at the ridiculous folly of men who make themselves slaves for the priviledge of setting four foot above other people, or rather of

<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Hollyday was the former Sarah Covington Lloyd of Somerset County, Md.; her second husband, Col. James Hollyday, died in 1747. Mrs. Hollyday went to England with her son James Hollyday about the same time as Dickinson; the purpose of her visit was to see her daughter (by her first husband, Col. Edward Lloyd), Rebecca Lloyd Anderson (Mrs. William Anderson). Mrs. Hollyday died in April, but her son stayed in England and pursued his studies at the Middle Temple until 1758. See George T. Hollyday, "Biographical Memoir of James Hollyday," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (PMHB), VII (1883), 426-447.

<sup>9</sup> Dickinson frequently included in his letters notes and bits of advice to his younger brother Philemon (1739-1809), of whom he was vastly more fond than of his half brother Henry. Philemon read law with John, attended the College of Philadelphia, and served with distinction with the New Jersey militia during the Revolution.

shewing to all the world what asses & scoundrels they are. But I have the wellfare & honour of my country so much at heart that sincerely I am afraid "the *nobility* of Kent" will be a nickname among the nations for persons every way despicable & shameful. As to the lawyers in Kent, their *numbers* are really terrifying, & they are still increasing.

I was very much diverted with my Honourd Mother's designing to add to the students of this profession; & greatly pleas'd with the entertainment you find in the chancery books, & I shall always reckon it one of the greatest losses that part of America & myself in particular ever met with, that these books did not belong to my grandfather rather than to me. The universal opinion is that Vernon & Peere Will[iam]s, who were men of great abilities & learning, far exceed the chancery cases or precedents, or any of these anonymous reports.<sup>10</sup> I wish I could possibly study with you. It woud be the most engaging employment, & when I return to America I hope to present you with two or three volumes of reports by myself. I have almost compleated one already by the notes I have taken in Westminster, but they are not designd pro bono publico, tho I shall be often oblidgd to quote them in court, if I can obtain the favour, for the advantage of them is inconceivable. I have a great many points resolv'd which I have not met with elsewhere, & a great many I have met with are in these contradicted & denied. The latest determinations in the law for some time before I came into business will evidently be very serviceable.

Enclosd I have sent two or three speeches made by some of the greatest men in Westminster Hall, just to give you some idea of that species of *humour* which is usd there. As it was only a motion for judgement on which the merits of the case & not any matter of law was considerd, I did not take notes of it, but when it was over, I thought there was something so odd in it that it woud be entertaining to you & immediately set down to recollect it, but I have not done justice to the gentlemen, for I was so hurried in Term with taking notes, & since with writing them off, that I believe I have forgot some things & am obligd to send the first rough draught.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Vernon was an eminent practitioner in the Court of Chancery; his posthumous volumes covered chancery cases from 1681 to 1720, and were rather poorly edited by Peere Williams.

I have not mentiond the speeches of Prime, the K[in]gs prime serjeant, nor Sir Richard Lloyds, because that strain which the others indulgd did not become their dignity & was not usd by them, tho they said a great deal very much to the point.<sup>11</sup> To explain part of Mr. Pont's speech, it may be necessary to add that Prime has a very fine hand, of which he is not a little vain, & he & Sir R[ichard] Ll[oyd] & Mr. Pratt are King's Counsel,<sup>12</sup> & set within a barr by themselves, & all barristers not King's Counsel set behind. . . .

February 19, 1755

Honourd Mother,

Your letter by Capt. Budden<sup>13</sup> I have recd & am greatly pleasd with the delight you take in all my little entertainments; indeed, I enjoy them doubly by the generous satisfaction they afford you. I am always most pleasd when in the country because it bears some greater resemblance to my dear home than this dirty, noisy city, the din & confusion of which banishes thought & peace & takes me almost from myself, & the pure air of the country certainly is necessary for the preservation of health. Mine is very good now & confirming dayly & I hope will be strong enough in time to bear to pass the Atlantick. My voyage here was far from doing me that service I expected, but I am now most thoroughly recovered.

As the spring is coming on & the country will soon be very pleasant & Hillary Term is now over, Robert<sup>14</sup> & I have taken lodgings on the banks of the Thames directly opposite to the park of Hampton

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Prime was made a serjeant in June, 1736, and became a King's Serjeant in 1757. See Robert Beatson, *A Political Index to the Histories of Great Britain and Ireland* . . . (London, 1788), I, 441. Richard Lloyd was M.P. for Totnes in 1754, Solicitor General, 1754-1756 (replaced by Charles Yorke), and became a baron of the Exchequer two years before he died in 1761.

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Pont has not been identified. Charles Pratt (1714-1794), 1st Earl Camden, was named King's Counsel in 1755, Attorney General in 1757, and chief justice of the Court of Common Pleas in 1761.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Budden, captain of the *Myrtilla*, was one of the best-known captains sailing between Philadelphia and London. His voyages were so frequent and safe that his ship was called the "bridge between the two ports." See *PMHB*, IV (1880), 167; XXXIX (1915), 380.

<sup>14</sup> Dickinson's continued friendship with Robert Goldsborough should be viewed against the backdrop of their family relationship. When the Dickinsons resided in Talbot County, Md., the Goldsboroughs were their closest neighbors. John Dickinson's half sister Elizabeth (1721-1749) married Robert's brother Charles in 1739.

Court, about a quarter of mile from Kingston & in a most charming part of the country. We shall move out the latter end of this week, & are resolvd to remember we are AMERICANS, to live soberly & prosecute our business.

I am determind to follow, as I always have endeavourd to do, my Honourd Mother's advice & to take the choicest care of my health, & I have always found the least excursions did me great service. I had two fine ones to St. Albans & up the Medway. In mentioning the first, I forgot one curiosity, which is the body, or rather now the bones, of Duke Humphry.<sup>15</sup> He is laid in a stone coffin which was once filld with a pickle, but after it was once discoverd, so many people went to see him & brought away the pickle, & by being exposd to the air it lost its strength so much that the flesh immediately rotted & decayd & now there is nothing but the bones, though about five & twenty years ago, I am told, the flesh was quite perfect.

Amongst the other entertainments I have had, I believe I have not mentiond my being at Court. On Ld Mayor's Day,<sup>16</sup> I receivd an invitation from the Barclays to come to their house in Cheapside to see the procession. When I came there, I found Mr. Penn & his lady & her sister, & a great company besides. Mr. Penn chatted with me almost the whole afternoon & amongst other things asked me if I had ever been at Court. I said, No, on which he offerd to take me with him on His Majestys birthday. I told him I understood the Court dressd very gay that day & that I had nothing smarter than what I then had on, which was a plain suit of broadcloth. Oh, says he, that will do very well. If you'll please to call on me by 12 oclock on the day, I shall be glad of your company. I thankd him & promisd to wait on him.

After the procession, which was finishd by 5 oclock, & consists of a great number of equipages belonging to the Ld Mayor, judges & aldermen, with the several companies of the city with their colours & streamers, I drank tea at Mr. Barclay's & then went to the Ld Mayor's ball at Guildhall with a tickett which had been given

<sup>15</sup> Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (1391-1447), was buried on the south side of the shrine of St. Albans; his tomb was opened in 1703 with the melancholy consequences described here by Dickinson.

<sup>16</sup> Lord Mayor's Day was Nov. 9; the inauguration of London's Lord Mayor was traditionally marked by a procession and ball.

me. I was so tired with the crowd, & nothing in the universe to entertain one, that I went home with a thorough resolution never to see ano[the]r Mayor's ball, which I believe I shall always keep.

On the 10th of Novr. N.S.<sup>17</sup> I waited on Mr. Penn, who took me with him in his coach to Court. Birthdays are always excessively fine, but this exceeded any that has been these many years, but to describe the dresses would be as impossible as to count the streamers on a Ld Mayor's Day. We entered into a large room of the Palace thro avenues lined with guards & spectators. This was the antichamber where all the noblemen & gentlemen stood; thro this, the ladies passed to another large room on the right hand. His Majesty's drawing room, where he sees company, was on the left, & that leads to the other parts of the Palace, but none went into this room but noblemen & officers of the highest rank. The gentlemen in the antichamber conversed with one another for about an hour, when the door of the drawing room was thrown open & those in the antichamber were admitted. Amongst the rest I found myself in the presence of the greatest & best king upon earth. He was standing up, surrounded by the Prince of Wales, Duke of Cumberland, Prince Edward, Ld. Chancellor, & all the Stars & Garters.<sup>18</sup> Nobody spoke a word to the King unless addressed by him. He stood with a gold laced hat under his arm, with all the modesty of a woman, & every now & then he said a few words to somebody about him, which I could not hear but, by the manner, I am sure were nothing but common enquiries & answers. Between his speaking, he constantly cast his eyes on the ground. In short, this seemed so painful a tax upon majesty that I *pitied* him. What is called paying their compliments to him is getting so near in the circle as to be seen & then bowing.

After ten minutes spent in this manner, the King bowed & moved towards another room, on which all the company bowed & returned into the antichamber, except the great personages I have mentioned. In a quarter of an hour after, the King came thro the antichamber &

<sup>17</sup> Dickinson liked to remind his mother of the new style calendar introduced into England by Lord Chesterfield in 1751. Samuel Dickinson had entered John's birth date in the family Bible as Nov. 2, 1732, but John preferred to reckon it by the Gregorian calendar as Nov. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Stars and garters were insignia of knighthood. Dickinson might well have had in mind Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, I, lines 85-86:

While Peers and Dukes, and all their sweeping train,  
And Garters, Stars, and Coronets appear. . . .

went to the ladies. In a few minutes he was followd by the Princess of Wales, led by the Prince of Wales, the Princess Amelia by the Duke of Cumberland, & the Princess Augusta by Prince Edward.<sup>19</sup> Then those that woud went after them, & the Royal Family chatted with the ladies a little while, & then a most wretched birthday ode was most exquisitely performd by a band of instrumental & vocal musick. Soon after this was done, they all returnd in the same order, & then the Court was over. I then went to that place where all the ladies get into their chairs & stood close by the Dukes of Grafton<sup>20</sup> & Marlbro', Ld Chamberlain, & Ld High Steward, whose duty it is to have the chairs calld & the ladies safe in them, & there, as they calld for the chairs, I had a fine opportunity of seeing & knowing all the ladies.—At 3 oclock I went away, tird of grandeur & an empty stomach, & satisfied in a little chophouse the hunger which I had procurd in a palace. Mr. Penn dind by engagement with the Earl of Granville,<sup>21</sup> or I shoud have gone with him.

It is inconceivable what a ferment this new scene put my mind in: such a multitude of various contending thoughts sprung up, vanishd, returnd, dyd. I was fird with ambition, but the difficulty of rising—a 1000 instances of the meanest persons—but by villainy—only the envy of the unsuccessful. But what are the mighty blessings to be attaind by the most happy ambition? What rewards for all its toils & cares? What recompense for all the peace & ease forfeited by its pursuit & to see a king at a little nearer distance or to wear a blue ribbond. But if my eyes are good, I see as well & am as happy three or four feet further off, & to a reasonable man a good broad-

<sup>19</sup> The royal family as described here by Dickinson requires careful identification. George II (1683–1760) had three sons and five daughters by Queen Caroline. After her death in 1737, he had not married again, despite Caroline's suggestion that he do so—"Non, j'aurai des maîtresses" was his famous reply. With the death of Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales, in 1751, the only surviving son was the Duke of Cumberland. The Princess Amelia Sophia Eleanora (1711–1786) was the only daughter on hand for Dickinson's scrutiny. The Princess of Wales was Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, mother of George William Frederick (1738–1820), now Prince of Wales and in 1760 George III. Princess Augusta (1737–1813) was George's older sister, and Edward, Duke of York (1739–1767), was his younger brother. George had three other brothers and one sister, all considered too young to attend Court in 1755.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Fitzroy (1683–1757), 2nd Duke of Grafton, was Lord High Chamberlain from 1724 until his death.

<sup>21</sup> John Carteret (1690–1763), Earl of Granville, had been Lord President of the Council since 1751.

cloth coat should be much more valuable than a bit of ribbon. But the world does not think those things so, & politeness has so far baffled wisdom now that people never enquire whether things are proper or improper, good or bad in their nature, but what they are in the general opinion or whim, & therefore we see daily & constantly men sacrificing virtue, ease & reason to vice, disquiet & folly to gain those things to which mankind have falsely annexed confused ideas of what is really desirable. In short, every one in the course of life starts after good, but the race is so headlong that they never look behind them & so never perceive the very prize they are running at, behind them. Indeed, some highly favoured by Divine Providence meet with friendly enemies who stop their career & turn them round, when to their amazement they find that happiness, lovely maid, who[m] they so rudely & madly pursued, by the commands of unbounded goodness waiting close behind to revive their wearied limbs & jaded spirits which they had fatigued in their vain & presumptuous chase.

Honoured Mother, please to excuse this long scrawl on this occasion, for really another birthday would make me a philosopher. I have not time to add more if your goodness would permit me, but shall write soon again. . . .

June 28, 1755

Honoured Father,

. . . I went on all last winter very briskly with reading & taking my notes, which I find to be the most profitable way of study I ever was in, till about the beginning of March I felt myself attacked by an uneasiness in my breast with which I used to be troubled in Philadelphia. In a little time it grew very troublesome, & was attended with fevers, upon which, by Mr. Hanbury's advice, I applied to physicians of the first rank in London. They immediately ordered me to intermit all manner of study, to get into the country & use exercise. Upon this, Robert & I took lodgings together at Kingston, & I received relief directly & am now quite recovered from my complaint, tho' not altogether recruited in strength. But I am daily growing stronger & have all the assurances human knowledge & foresight can afford, that by the end of the summer I shall be heartier than ever. . . .

The remonstrance of the Pennsylvania Assembly is rejected by the Lds of Trade. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Kingston upon Thames

August 12, 1755

Most Dear & Honourd Father,

. . . I wrote to you lately acquainting you with the bad state of my health this summer & my recovery, but as I know you will be uneasy I take every opportunity to inform you of my growing better daily. The complaint in my breast with the fever have both entirely left me & I never have the least return of either, so that I have no manner of sickness & have nothing to do but to recover the strength I had lost, & that, by the blessing of my All-Gracious Maker and Preserver, returns like a flood tide. I can walk four or five miles, & ride twelve or fifteen, & scarce feel the least fatigue, & I am sure by the end of the fall to be as strong as ever I was.

I am extremely sorry to hear such bad accounts of crops, & to know that tobo. bears so poor a price, especially as my health has put me to expences I could not avoid. Mr. Hanbury has behaved with his usual kindness to me, & frequently calld upon me at Kingston, & once, upon my saying I did not know how I should do if tobo. was so low, he told me I might draw on him for whatever sums I pleasd. He is certainly the most worthy man living.

Nothing, most Honourd Parent, can equal the uneasiness I feel from the necessity of being idle. It is such an interruption to a glorious course of study I cannot bear to think on it. . . .

The French are actually afraid to declare war. Sir Edwd Hawke is saild from Spithead with 20 ships of the line, but no one except the regency knows his design.<sup>23</sup> No secretaries are trusted. Sir Tho.

<sup>22</sup> The remonstrance came out of the bill offered Governor Morris in December, 1754. The measure called for £20,000 in bills of credit to aid General Braddock, but Morris vetoed it because it lacked a suspending clause as required by royal order in 1740. The Pennsylvania Assembly protested to the Board of Trade, and hearings were held on May 6, 1755; Hume Campbell and Forrester represented Thomas Penn and his governor and secured a ringing endorsement. See Theodore Thayer, *Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740-1776* (Harrisburg, 1953), 35-38, and James Munro, ed., *Acts of the Privy Council, 1745-1766* (London, 1911), IV, 288. (Forrester frequently appears in the records as counsel for one or another of the colonies, and is referred to simply as "Mr. Forrester.")

<sup>23</sup> Sir Edward Hawke (1705-1763) had been delayed for months by arguments between Newcastle and Cumberland over just how aggressive they should be against the French (George II was still in Hanover). Hawke was finally given carte blanche to attack French



Robinson in the Council & Ld Anson<sup>24</sup> in the Admiralty wrote all the dispatches. We have 20 ships of the line now at Spithead, since Hawke's departure, ready for the [sea], while all the endeavours of France cant put 20 to sea, tho they have been preparing ever since the last war, we not above 7 months. But what most evidently proves our superiority is that two state lotteries being set up for £1,000,000, one in London, the other in Paris, ours 22 blanks to a prize, theirs very advantagious to the subscribers, yet we had £4,000,000 subscribed by the city of London alone in five days, while the whole kingdom of France was six months in compleating theirs—the glorious effects of freedom & miserable consequences of slavery. . . .

Kingston upon Thames

August 12, 1755

Most Honourd Mother,

. . . I take all kind of diversions: I go afishing & riding every day, for the Thames is not forty feet from our door, & at home I am very happy with Gouldsbrough & his wife.<sup>25</sup> I am very sorry to hear my brother disapproves of it, but hope he will be reconcild when he receives Mr. Hanburys letter & knows it was done by his consent. You judge very rightly that it was a sudden affair. G. was not acquainted with the lady above three months, & at the time of our taking lodgings did not expect to be married so soon, for he was desirous to get his father's consent, & she not thinking it proper to stay for it. Just at that time we took lodgings. Afterwards she agreed to stay, & then G. mentiond it to Mr. Hanbury to get him to write in favour of it to his father. Mr. Hanbury approvd of it & did not think it necessary to stay, upon wh[ich] they were married. My dear Father says my brother wrote immediately by the way of Philadelphia, he supposes to stop any further allowance. I shoud be glad to know whether he mentiond any such thing, & what he says on re-

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vessels "and to send them into port without embezzlement till his Majesty's pleasure be known." Hawke cruised between Ushant and Cape Finisterre fruitlessly, returning to Spithead on Sept. 29. See Evan E. Charteris, *William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, and the Seven Years' War* (London, 1928), 162–165.

<sup>24</sup> Lord George Anson was First Lord of the Admiralty, 1751–1756 and 1757–1762.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Goldsborough married Sarah Yerbury, daughter of Richard Yerbury of Bassinghall St., London, on Mar. 27, 1755.

ceiving Mr. H's letter. When G. first mentiond to me his marrying without his father's consent, I told him it was not what I shoud chuse to do, & that parents had a right to be consulted, if not implicitly obeyd, in that important affair of life. But finding it was settled, I did not urge arguments which might injure me but I found woud profit nobody else.

Mrs. Goldsborough's fortune is £4,000 Sterling, 2,000 of which are settled in such a manner as not to be disposd of. I believe it is settled on her for life, then to her children, & if she dies without children, to her relations. The other 2,000 belong absolutely to her, & consequently by the marriage to her husband.

I am very glad I think so much like my Honourd Parents with respect to marriage. I never shall think I am at liberty to dispose of myself without their consent who gave me being, and if I shoud ever be so mad as to do it, tho you shoud forgive me, I shoud never forgive myself.

I am glad to hear Miss Vining is going to Philada. I hope her charms will procure her a husband worthy of them.<sup>26</sup> I am very much afraid I shall grow one of those foolish fellows who have annexd so many fine qualities to the ladies that shall enslave them that they never find any possest of one half, & loiter away life in expecting a Dulcinea that exists no where but in their own imagination.<sup>27</sup> There are so many defects in human nature that a man may think of five hundred which are not in the woman he admires, upon wh[ich] he thinks himself secure, but afterwards discovers some one that in so great a number escapd his view, & is miserably convincd that 99 blows avoided are no shield against the hundredth. . . .

September 30, 1755

Most Honourd Father,

I have not yet left my lodgings at Kingston, but coming to town yesterday & hearing of this opportunity, I have just time to pour out

<sup>26</sup> Mary Vining was the gay and sociable daughter of John Vining, Speaker of the House of the Lower Counties (Delaware); her charms did not secure her the happiness or husband Dickinson hoped for her. See John A. Munroe, "The Philadelawarians," *PMHB*, LXIX (1945), 137-138, and Elizabeth Montgomery, *Reminiscences of Wilmington* (Wilmington, Del., 1872), 150.

<sup>27</sup> Dickinson refers to Dulcinea del Toboso, the lady of Don Quixote's dreams. Dickinson was not to marry until his thirty-eighth year, when Mary Norris finally accepted his suit. See Charles J. Stillé, *The Life and Times of John Dickinson, 1732-1808* [Historical Society of Pennsylvania *Memoirs*, XIII] (Philadelphia, 1891), 313.

the most sincere declarations of unfeigned duty & affection, & to inform the kindest & best of parents of my health.

I am now grown extremely strong & hearty & have begun my reading again. I shall return to the Temple the first of Novr., which is Michaelmas Term, & am not the least doubtful of prosecuting my studies with the greatest success.

The price of tobo. is now very good, but Mr. Hanbury desird me to come & look at some of ours which came last from Philada, six hog[sheads] of which have been so excessively ill managd that he does not think they will pay the freight, & six more are very indifferent. The packers have been very careless, or else it has been hurt in the house.

Please to excuse this hasty scrawl. I write in another gentlemans chambers, & in the greatest hurry, but expect another opportunity soon to write more at large. . . .

January 8, 1756

Most Honourd Father,

. . . My last letters informd you of my recovering from a severe fit of sickness, which by a fever weakend me very much. By the blessing of Almighty Providence my strength recruited so fast that I returnd to town the latter end of October, & have ever since found London to agree with me perfectly well. I am now so hearty that for some months I have studied not idly, & have attended Westminster Hall except in bad weather so that I hope to improve my time to the best advantage.

As I have great reason to believe that my disorder proceeded from my bending to write, I now read & write at a high desk at which I am oblidgd to stand. This was a little troublesome at first, but custom has reconcild me so well to it now, & it agrees with me, that I have not the least uneasiness in my breast & doubt not but by this means entirely to avoid the inconveniences I usd to find in study.

I am indeed so perfectly recoverd now that all the disadvantage I lye under from my sickness is loss of time & the want of that confirmd strength & constitution which I might have expected but for this interruption. However, I have hopes now that with care I shall still be a robust fellow. I am particularly enjoind exercise, & tho I cant have as much in town as in the country, yet I find that fencing & even shuttlecock can give me a good breathing spell. . . .

I . . . cant conclude without mentioning a catastrophe in Europe, of which I suppose some accounts as well as some signs have already reachd your world. The first of November, the city of Lisbon was utterly destroyd by an earthquake & a conflagration ensuring the fall of the houses. The shocks, most astonishing & dreadful, continued for almost two months, by which every town in Portugal has been almost ruind.<sup>28</sup>

To pretend to give any account of this misfortune would be to lessen it all I can. The curious & learned have their compassion swallowd up in fresh enquiries, whether these dreadful events are the directions of Providence particularly to punish mankind, or proceed from natural causes. But great God! May not the same instructive lesson be learnt from either, that humanity is uncertainty, and AB HOC MOMENTO PENDET AETERNITAS.<sup>29</sup> By the very smallest computation, 20,000 lives are lost; the richest prince in Europe more wretched than a bankrupt. Accounts are just arrivd that his army are turnd dissolute & lawless & plunder the miserable remains of his subjects. . . .

March 17, 1756

Dear & Honourd Mother,

I have recd your letter dated in November with my Honourd Father's, & . . . I find by both letters that my return is expected in America this summer, & I am afraid of giving new uneasiness by saying it will be better to stay a little longer. The reason is that my health is dayly encreasing & growing better, & with the blessing of Almighty God I hope some more time & exercise will make me heartier than ever I was. But there might be some little danger in going to sea before I have gaind a sufficient stock of strength to bear a voyage. The difference is, if I shoud come this summer, I probably shall be much longer in recovering the voyage, & if I come the spring after, I shall come very hearty.

<sup>28</sup> Lisbon had suffered from earthquakes for centuries, but that of Nov. 1, 1755, combined with fire and a tidal wave, reduced the city to ruins. The shock was felt from Scotland to Asia Minor, and in Portugal itself between 10,000 and 20,000 persons lost their lives. Property damage was estimated at about £20,000,000. Colonial newspapers reported minor earthquakes during the night of Nov. 17, before news of Lisbon had reached America. See the *Boston Gazette*, Nov. 24, 1755.

<sup>29</sup> "All eternity hangs on this moment." Probably from Horace.

What gives me great encouragement is that I dont feel the least return of the complaint in my breast, & as I use more exercise & a different way of reading, I fancy it was a neglect of these that brot it upon me. I have been advisd to stand at a high desk to read & write, & that, coming to the upper part of my breast, keeps me necessarily erect & in the easiest posture. This agrees with me extremely well, & tho it was a little troublesome at first, yet I can now stand two hours together without any trouble, so that I do every thing on my legs & may properly enough be calld a peripatetick lawyer; & tho no great adept in natural philosophy, if ever I should be inducd to scribble on that science it shall be on the benefits of keeping on our legs, which nature certainly designd to be usd more than they commonly are by people of any fashion in life. I am sure I have found very great advantages from it.

I cannot express the pain I felt from the account of that dreadful midnight. I tremble for the consequences of such a shock to such a delicate frame as my dear Mother's. But I hope there never will be such another; I pray to God there may not. I cannot imagine that Kent is in the least danger; its quite removd from it & defended by nature from incursions, & the other inner parts of the province must be secure too, at least now, when something has been done by the legislature.<sup>30</sup> The government here are taking the most vigorous measure for our assistance & protection. Ld Loudon, who distinguishd himself in the late rebellion so much, will sail in a fortnight for America to take upon him the command in chief.<sup>31</sup> His Ldship's character is such as fills every body with the greatest expectations. He is a complete soldier & a fine gentleman, has a sound judgm[en]t, great coolness, & a most engaging, affable behaviour, so that his authority & prudence will very probably prevent any ill consequences from the pride & folly of the other officers & the governors.

<sup>30</sup> On the night of Nov. 7, 1755, reports circulated throughout the Lower Counties of a strong French and Indian raiding party of some 1,500 men within thirty miles of Baltimore. The militia in Kent County turned out in force, only to discover later that the reports were false. See the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Nov. 20, 1755.

<sup>31</sup> John Campbell (1705-1782), Lord Loudoun, was appointed commander in chief of British forces in North America, Mar. 20, 1756; he did not reach New York until July 23. In December, 1757, he was recalled for failure to communicate his actions and plans to his superiors. Stanley Pargellis, *Lord Loudoun in North America* (New Haven, Conn., 1933), 346.

The government have already taken up transports for 2,500 men, which will sail with his Ldship. Some of these will be the best troops in England. It is said there will be 3 or 4 regiments more raisd in America on the English establishment, & His Majesty has obtaind a very large sum of money from the Commons to reward & give further encouragement to the colonies who have distinguished themselves.

All these things will undoubtedly make our affairs bear a very agreeable face this summer, especially considering the present circumstances of things in Europe. Whether war will be declar'd or not is as uncertain as it was a year ago, & it is not likely France will be very forward to do it. She will have no allies.<sup>32</sup> Spain has declar'd her neutrality; Hanover is secure by a treaty with Prussia; so that if we do engage, it must be with our own powers & at sea, & we are so superior on that element that for France to declare war will be only to declare her own weakness. She is very sensible of this & therefore will not suffer the least act of hostility in Europe, while we are every day taking their vessels, so that they exclaim ag[ainst] our perfidy, & woud perswade the world that it is their faith, the observance of treaties & love of publick peace that ties their hands, & not the want of power, which specious excuse wo[ul]d be lost by a declaration of war. For as we have nothing he can fall upon on the Continent, the grand monarch's arms, long as they are, cant reach over the Channel.

The French have but 59 ships of the line, & we have 150. The difference of lesser vessels is much greater; we have 10,000 men more for the sea service than we had either in Queen Ann's War, or the last, & so many of these are already on board that it is an undoubted truth our fleet is better man'd *now* than it was at the *end* of the last war—I have this from several gentlemen of the Navy—& at the end of last war we had the finest fleet England ever knew; & yet our compliment of sailors is not yet full. Our officers were all traind up last war, & are excellent ones. The whole kingdom are in great spirits, & highly approve of the conduct of the Ministry. On the other hand the French are prodigiously dissatisfied; their trade will be utterly ruind in another year; the poor wretches have not yet recoverd the miseries of the last war, while the pride & ambition of

<sup>32</sup> Later in 1756, the treaties of Versailles brought in Austria and Russia as allies of France, and Hanover's security vanished.

their monarch devours the ease & happiness of his subjects. His taxes flea the poor sheep that can afford no more wool. Their fleet is a sad condition. We have above 10,000 of their sailors, which is a very considerable number, & they want both cannon & cordage, which they generally have from Sweden, Denmark, &c, & we take care to leave no probability of their being supplied from these places.

But above all, they want money, so well known to be the sinews of war. The king has made a lottery, which fills very slowly & leisurely. We had one, opend, subscribd, & ended at the same instant almost. He squeezes his officers by pretence of borrow[ing], but what kind of loan is that where the creditor dare not demand & the debtor is not obligd to pay. They hardly will venture to encrease their wretchedness by plunging into further expences. They have made a great many offers, His Majesty tells the Parliament in his speech, but none such as are consistent with the dignity of his Crown & the security of his people, & His Majesty, the Ministry & the whole kingdom are so convind of the great advantages we have over our neighbours that peace will never be concluded but on such terms as are highly for our honour & safety. They must agree to such as we think proper, & I hope the Ministry will act with the same spirit they have begun.

Surely, our superiority will prevent their getting over any more men to Canada; & then we probably shall be more than a match for them there, if the provinces can be inducd to do their duty. The agents of the several colonies were calld before the Lds of Trade & Plantations to be informd of the condition they were in, & what they had done. Ld Halifax<sup>33</sup> said some of them had contributed more than they were able to bear, & others who were very able had done nothing at all. Richd. Partridge<sup>34</sup> who knew very well that Pennsylvania was included amongst the last, began to defend the Assembly & represent the conscientious perswasion they were restrained by, for the peaceable enjoyment of which they removd to that province, then a desert, in hopes to live undisturbd under it. Upon which,

<sup>33</sup> George Montagu Dunk (1716-1771), 2nd Earl of Halifax, was president of the Board of Trade from 1748 to June, 1756, and pressed hard for a greater colonial effort against the French. Unlike Newcastle, he had favored some form of immediate colonial union.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Partridge was colonial agent for the Pennsylvania Assembly. Born in New Hampshire in 1681, Partridge visited England in 1701 and stayed until his death in 1759. See Marguerite Appleton, "Richard Partridge, Colonial Agent," *New England Quarterly*, V (1932), 293-309.

Ld. Halifax replied that if they were left to themselves they were not like to live but to dye under it, if they were left to themselves. But yet it is not certain whether any thing will be done here to put the province in a better state of defence.

I fancy the government will not be very forward in exacting the power they are possessd of in any uncommon manner. Francis<sup>35</sup> has been over here these several months; he supd with me some time ago, & told me he never designd to practize the law any more. What he does design I believe no body but himself knows, but he is entirely on the side of the Assembly, & there have several things come out in the publick papers in their favour, which I am sure are the offsprings of his pen. He speaks in conversation with great warmth of the settling the Ohio lands, & I fancy he has some scheme or another in his head in which he expects to be of use to the Ministry. He hinted, dropd in a half-careless, half-important manner, that he had been let to know that Mr. Secretary Fox woud be glad to speak with him, but finding on enquiring that he woud have nothing to do but to answer such interrogatories as shoud be askd him, & that he would not be at liberty to harangue at liberty, he declind the honour. I thought this some discovery of his intentions. Speaking of the advantages of living in London, he said it was the best place in the world to teach a man the knowledge of himself, & the folly of pride & haughtiness. I confess this put me in mind of Dionysius at Corinth.<sup>36</sup> Uncle Cadwalader advises me to be cautious of what I say to him, but before I recd his kind hint I never mentiond a word of Pensilvania, & my silence has been so strict that he can imagine nothing but that I look on him as a statesman in disgrace, & tenderly avoid the mention of his fall. He lives in an odd manner; I dont hear of his going any where but to Barclays. He has never yet been to Mr. Anderson's, tho frequently invited by him. Mrs. Anderson attributes it to some quarrel between him & Mr. Allen,<sup>37</sup> whose family are her particular friends.

I dind with that good lady on Christmas Day, according to custom, when she desird me as often as I wrote to remember her sincere love

<sup>35</sup> Tench Francis was attorney general for Pennsylvania, 1741-1755; he retired because of ill health and died in 1758.

<sup>36</sup> Dionysius "the younger" was forced by Timoleon to retire to Corinth in 343 B.C., where he lived out his years in poverty.

<sup>37</sup> William Allen (1704-1780), merchant, lawyer, and chief justice of Pennsylvania, 1750-1774.



to you. She spoke of you as one of her dearest & most valuable, & I was in raptures to hear her give in a large company so just & great a character of my Honourd Mother. She is big with child again, when I believe it was little expected, but I never saw her look so well. Mrs. Goldsborough has a fine boy, & they are both very hearty. . . .

Please to remember me to our good neighbours that shall enquire. I wish I was amongst my gallant countrymen with a musket on my shoulder, but I wish, too, that the operations of their campaign may never be more dangerous than the chasing their officers. . . .

April 1, 1756

Honourd Father,

. . . The winter has been extremely fine, & has agreed with me perfectly, & the summer I dont doubt will be of the greatest service. I design to take some small journies, which will be very improving in point of knowledge & serve to confirm my health still more. . . .

I shall endeavour to get the management of any business from London that may fall within my practize, & if any thing is intended to be done in those particular instances you mentiond, I am pretty sure of being employd. At present, it is my utmost endeavour to qualify myself to do justice to those who shall hereafter rely upon me. I have been this winter engagd in a very laborious business of transcribing three manuscript vols in large quarto of the ART OF READING, wh[ic]h my Lord Coke says is the very life of the law. These books were compild by a great man at the barr for his own use, & he giving copies of them to his particular friends, they have at last travelld into my hands, & I think they are a valuable treasure. I have found great benefit [*letter incomplete*]

May 10, 1756

Honourd Father,

. . . The publick affairs of Europe continue as they have been a great while, that is, many things talkd of but nothing done. People are employd at present with a supposd expedition from Toulon against Port Mahon,<sup>38</sup> but if any thing is designd, it is certain we have a very considerable force in the Mediterranean. There are

<sup>38</sup> The "supposed expedition" of 15,000 men under the Duc de Richelieu reached Minorca on Apr. 18, 1756. Most British forces were still concentrated in home waters, fearing a direct attack on England. See Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The Great War for the Empire: The Years of Defeat, 1754-1757* (New York, 1959), Chap. XIII.

several fleets now at sea, but no news of any thing performd by them, & if they dont utterly prevent the enemy's sending the least reinforcements to America, I dont know the least service the Ministry can shew for the immense expence the nation has been put to.

In times of open war, the advantage made of a superior naval force is to destroy the enemy's coast & alarm & distract their counsels & fatigue & wear out their troops. This is what one woud expect now, but perhaps there may be some politick reason which may restrain the Ministry from these extremities of war before a declaration, & this induces me to believe that the French will hardly set a precedent by attacking Minorca, which may be retorted upon them all round their coasts; or, if they do, I hope we shall see our ships do something else besides going to Brest, eating up their provisions, & coming back again for more.

It woud be very natural to imagine that a greater grant than ever was made by an English Parliament woud produce something at least equal to what has been done on much smaller, but there is little probability that 50,000 seamen will do any thing but furnish some gentlemen with an opportunity of handling so many more millions. I think it must be evident we have it in our power to distress the French settlements, especially in the West Indies, & that must necessarily confuse & weaken them; & it is certain, while things are in their present situation, the French have not one single object to which they are obligd to direct their view but to America, & common sense must tell them that they can have no possible counter ballance for our advantages but vigorously pushing us there, and it woud be the height of stupidity to imagine they will not exert every engine of craft & power to effect it. There were two vessels lately sent into Plimouth, designd for America, with arms &c and 180 officers, which proves what has been often said that by every private ship that sails their colonies receive a military supply, & with what constant & careful attention their government regards them. Ld Loudon is not saild, but the transports are. . . .

June 6, 1756

Honourd Father,

. . . The town agrees with me so well that I dont think of leaving it till the Terms are over, which will not be these five or six weeks. The gentlemen of the long robe have been put into a very warm

ferment by the sudden death of *Ld. Chief Justice Ryder*. The vacancy is not yet filld up, & there are great doubts who will be appointed. *Murray*, the *Attorney General*, stands next in place & there can be no objection to his merit. But yet there are two reasons against his promotion to this post. One is the great loss he will suffer by accepting it, as the salary is but £4,000 a year & his practize amounts to more than eight; the other reason is that the Ministry cant well spare him out of the *House of Commons*, where he is the only match they have for one *Pitt*, a discontented statesman who is the patriot of the times & gives them a good deal of trouble.<sup>39</sup> If *Murray*, however, is appointed, tis very probably *Sir Rich. Lloyd* will succeed him, & *Mr. Yorke*, a son of the *Chancellor*, be made *Sollicitor General*.

I hope I am something excusable in beginning with news which arise, as it were, in my own province, tho they are less important than those of kingdoms & states. The name of war was given to the military operations of us & our enemies the 18th of last mo[nth], a ceremony I was glad to see once, but, considering the subject, I think the seeing once very sufficient to gratify the most eager curiosity. We have no accounts yet of *France* having declard war, but their hostile invasion of the island of *Minorca* is mentiond by *His Majesty* as the more immediate cause of his declaration.

You must by this time have had very full accounts of this expedition. Its fate is not yet determind, tho people's minds are wound up to the highest pitch of expectation, & advice is lookd for every moment. The last accounts to the government & which may be depended on are that *Admiral Byng* left *Gibraltar* the 8th of May with 13 ships of the line & 3 or 4 frigates, with 1,000 on board for reinforcement of *Fort St. Philip*, the only fortification that can possibly hold out against the enemy; that *Byng* had a fair wind for four days after leaving *Gibraltar*, in which time the voyage from thence to *Port Mahon* is generally performd; & that the garrison of *St. Philip*, tho closely beseigd, held out till the 11th when the last expresses saild.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> William Pitt (1708-1778), 1st Earl of Chatham, attacked the Newcastle ministry with rising ferocity, charging "we had provoked before we could defend, and neglected after provocation." Pitt forced Newcastle's fall in November, 1756.

<sup>40</sup> John Byng (1704-1757) mismanaged the poorly prepared expedition sent to relieve *Minorca* in May, 1756. *St. Philip's Castle* surrendered on June 28.

The besiegers are protected by a fleet of 11 line of battle ships & some frigates, & as Byng, according to the highest degree of probability, must have arrivd at Minorca the 12th, there must either have been an engagement, or the French have retir'd. Which of these has happend is utterly unknown, but under the cloud of this uncertainty, a crop of lies springs up every moment. I was in the city yesterday & heard from *indubitable authority* that Byng had beat the French & the French had beat Byng, that Byng had run away without fightg & that the French had run away without fighting. In short, that there had been no fight or, if any, like that in the old song, "And we ran & they ran too."

Amidst these clamorous falsehoods, which are generally urg'd with the more noise as there is the less reason in them, men of sense & moderation argue from the certainty of known facts to the probability of doubtful consequences, & upon cool reflexion find no very strong reasons to be under any great apprehensions.

St. Philip could not be taken before Byng's arrival. If the enemy declind an engagement by sea, the garrison woud be reinforced & the besiegers very much distressd. If the enemy fought us, there is ground to hope from our superiority, from the eagerness with which Byng solicited this command & the spirit of our sailors, that we shall have the advantage. If we have, the French must be just in the same condition the poor Spaniards were upon the island of Sicily, when their fleet was demolishd by this Byng[s] father in the beginning of George the First's reign.<sup>41</sup>

Whatever is the event of these things, it is certain the Ministry have disgustd the nation extremely in their conduct of this affair. They had receivd intelligence of the destination of the armament at Toulon—nay, it was known all over the kingdom—a great while before they thought of sending a fleet into the Mediterranean, & when [they] began to talk of it, they were so dilatory in their preparations that at last the fleet seemd to be driven away by the complaints of the people. The fault is generally laid on the Duke of New Castle, who enterd very unwillingly into this war, & that Pitt I have mentiond has declar'd if Port Mahon is taken he will impeach His Grace.

<sup>41</sup> George Byng (1663–1733), Viscount Torrington, the hero of the victory off Cape Passaro in 1718.

The Ministry have given great offence, too, by rejecting a militia bill for putting this kingdom into a state of defence by an internal power. I was in the House of Lords when it was thrown out by a majority of 59 to 23, tho it had passd *unanimously* in the House of Commons. The Earl of Halifax distinguished himself very much in a speech for the bill, & the Ld. Chanc[ello]r said as much against it as could be said. But I confess some of the arguments made use of against it I was astonishd to hear from Englishmen. The Earl of Granville set out professedly against all militias, condemning them as weak & fruitless attempts. The Chanc[ello]r did not begin on so large a foundation & said he desird it might not be understood as if he was prejudicd against all kinds of militias, or was willing to perpetuate the necessity of our being defended by mercenary & foreign troops as we now are; but when he was enterd into the warmth of argument, he forgot the bounds he had prescribd himself & his opinion was full as extensive as Granville's, for he laid great stress on this, that a militia woud introduce a military spirit, woud destroy that commercial one which is now become a part of the English Constitution, & in a little time, it woud be necessary to make laws for suppressing it, as we lately were obligd to do for Scotland. If this is not perpetuating the necessity of our defence by foreign troops, I dont know what is. But such is the complacency these great men have for the smiles of their prince that they will gratify every desire of ambition & power at the expence of truth, reason & their country. So ridiculously weak are we with all the means of strength in our hands that, as the Earl of Bath said, it is a common expression in France "that when they want to give us a sound fright of an invasion, they have nothing to do but to white-wash St. Germans, & the preparations for this affair will do the job effectually.["]"<sup>42</sup>

The other powers of Europe seem very inclinable to preserve a strict neutrality, & there is not the least whisper of the French

<sup>42</sup> William Pulteney (1684-1764), Earl of Bath, led the anti-Walpole Whigs, and joined with Bolingbroke in writing *The Craftsman*. Pulteney was vigorously opposed to standing armies, which he regarded as "incompatible with the Being of a Free Government." See his *Proper Answer to the Bystander* (London, 1742), 20. St. Germans was the predecessor to Versailles, and was given to the exiled Stuarts by Louis XIV; the phrase "white-wash St. Germans" refers to a fresh interest in the Stuarts on the part of France, and bespoke a possible Jacobite invasion. The memory of the 1745 rising was still green for many Englishmen.

intrigue succeeding in any court, so that the two nations will very probably be left to try their own proper strength.

This affair of Minorca being so near seems to have driven America out of people's heads, but I wish very much to hear from you. We have had no accounts a good while, & I imagine something must be done by this time on one side or the other. Ld. Loudon will arrive long before this, & I hope a great deal from his prudence & conduct. Our new gov[ernor]<sup>43</sup> will sail soon, too, & being a military gentleman will perhaps overcome that lethargick quietism which hitherto has cast such a gloom over us. But I have from very good authority that Mr. Penn has been oblig'd to give up all disputes about the land tax & paper money, so that on the whole, neither he nor the Assembly have any great reason to boast.<sup>44</sup> The Quakers Yearly Meeting is now setting & I suppose they will now appoint deputies to their Pensilvanian brethren to sail immediately after it is over.

Tench Francis has had a violent fit of sickness, but is now very well recoverd. I think, from what I can gather from him, he came over for the government; I am apt to think he relied on the Quaker interest. . . .

P.S. This instant there is advice of Admiral Boscawen's taking 13 Martineco men & two East India ships.<sup>45</sup>

June 6, 1756

Honourd Mother,

. . . My health has been so very good that I have reaped more benefit from my studies in these six months past than I ever did in the space of any part of my life. . . .

Necessity has taught me a method of studying which I have communicated to several gentlemen with no little approbation of the

<sup>43</sup> Col. William Denny was the new governor (August, 1756, to November, 1759).

<sup>44</sup> Dickinson's optimism as to Denny's probable success was soon dispelled. The contest between Thomas Penn and the Pennsylvania Assembly persisted, although an occasional truce was called when the situation in the West became an imperial disgrace. Penn did not concede the tax issue until 1759, and then it was only because James Hamilton refused to serve again as governor unless Penn modified his instructions on this point.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Boscawen (1711-1761) was made vice-admiral in February, 1755, and charged with blockading French Canada; in this he was mainly unsuccessful. See Gipson, *The Great War for the Empire . . . 1754-1757*, Chap. V.

design & the frankness of the intelligence. I have always accustomed myself to taking notes, but I found that very often by setting down single points of law I was at a great loss when I referred to my notes for forming an opinion, for this study consists of so many distinctions, & so many exceptions, all intimately related & mutually dependant on each other, that it was quite impossible to collect all the different members (as I may call them) of an opinion scattered in so many places, or to perceive the very nice connexion between them when separated at such a distance. To remove this inconvenience, I have endeavoured to throw the law relating to each head together, & to marshall them in such a manner that some maxim or general principle shall seem, as it were, the trunk of the tree, the larger divisions the branches, & all the little niceties & minutenesses the twigs & leaves. One's knowledge may be said to flourish when digested in this manner, & this regularity frees one from a thousand errors confusd & undistinguishd reading produces. Besides, it really saves a great deal of labour & keeps our learning like a sword, always bright & ready to be drawn; whereas, if a man, after laboriously studying a point & turning over a multitude of books, contents himself with briefly noting down the result of the whole without remarking the particular circumstances which lead to it, in a little time they will rust in his memory & he must go through the same drudgery again to revive them, besides the danger he runs that when such niceties are forgot he wont have the least suspicion that there are such. How then can he communicate them to others? Or, if [he] sets them down singly & each by itself, how will he be surprizd, when he quotes it as a general rule before judges, to hear his antagonist say, This grows out of such a maxim, it extends only so far, & then divides itself into two parts, one of which is exactly our case.

In short, I am convinced by experience that a person must be led into endless mistakes unless he has the substance of his knowledge disposd in a regular manner, & I am also convincd from my little attempts that something like the way I have got into may be of service, & I will spare no pains to make mine so to me.

Perhaps if this letter should fall into the hands of some people they might think it a little odd to talk so much to you about the method of studying law, but they would excuse it if they knew the tenderness with which you regard everything that concerns me, & how little

pleasure I take in any thing unless sweetend by a consciousness of your knowledge & approbation of it.

I have by the blessing of Divine Providence such good health that I flatter myself with the most agreeable hopes of returning to my native country with some share of reputation, that is, with proofs of not having mispent my time, for if I am not capable of greater improvement it is my misfortune & not my fault, & I hope my friends & myself will find sufficient satisfaction in my having discharged my duty according to my abilities, if not according to our wishes. How much I desire to shew myself worthy of their goodness is easier to be conceivd by a generous mind than describ'd by the most ingenious pen. I quite long to begin the "militia forensis,"<sup>46</sup> but I must confess that my courage, I believe, is a little false, like a young soldier in his first regimentals, & I fancy I should be apt to tremble at the signal of battle. However, I must comfort myself that a little cowardice has been the fault of the greatest orators.

So were I equalld with them in renown.<sup>47</sup> Mil[ton]

As to publick affairs, there is nothing new except His Majesty's declaration of war against France on the 15th of last month, which has not made & is not likely to make the least alteration in the face of affairs. There are about 8 thousand Hessians & 3 or 4,000 Hanoverians landed here for our defence in case of an invasion.

This is a piece of policy that has disobligd the nation extremely, for instead of raising a certain natural & sufficient power by a militia, a whole people are to depend for protection on the precarious external & slender force of foreign troops who must be instantly recalld if the politicks of Germany should take the least turn, & if they stay here, must be very disagreeable to all men who value their liberties & Constitution by setting a precedent, which in cases of the Crown has ever been found an immutable law, for the increase of the regal power, the strides of which since the Revolution have been gigantick. Rapin says with a grave face what no man in these times can read without a smile, "That Charles the Second to make the people *sensible* of the *slavery* that was imposed on them, resolv'd to

<sup>46</sup> Dickinson is looking forward to "the battle of court debate."

<sup>47</sup> Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book III, line 34.



review his troops, which by the return of the garrison of Tangier, amounted to *no less than four thousand* men effective & well armd.[<sup>48</sup>]

The standing forces of this kingdom in time of profoundest peace are 20,000 men & these by the bare magick of the word *INVASION* are multiplied to 40,000, tho the French dare not look us in the face at sea, & notwithstanding their agility cannot yet skip from Calais to Dover. There cant one single reason be assignd why England should look for her security ashore rather than on that element which nature has so kindly spread round her; or, if she should make so absurd a choice, can one single reason be assignd why that important trust should be committed to slaves & foreigners rather than to freemen & natives, but that it pleases the King; nor can the most ingenious artists in cloathing imperial desires with specious pretences give one reason for its pleasing but such a one as even their modesty will never suffer them to give, *that it will encrease his power*.

When concessions are made to princes, tis as ridiculous to think of stopping as for a master of a ship to guess at the depth of water in an ebb tide, which every moment decreases till he is convincd of his folly by running aground. There, indeed, the comparison ceases, for the vessell, if she does not split with striking, will be reliev'd with the next flood. But there is no flood in power. When it has got a turn one way, there is no means in nature for altering its course but violence, & I think a moderate acquaintance with the English history<sup>49</sup> will teach one this truth, & also that most of our civil wars have been given up singly or wink'd at in Parliament, so dangerous is what some people call complaisance & trust in their prince. For my part, I confess I have not the most remote suspicion of his present Majesty's most gracious & hearty affection for the wellfare of this people & Constitution, & (as Bolingbroke says) I dare engage that

<sup>48</sup> Dickinson's quotation from Rapin's *History of England* (London, 1732-1733) is actually manufactured from Vol. II, pp. 734 and 733, in that order. Rapin began: "To make the people in some measure fully sensible of their new slavery [*in 1684*], the King affected to muster his forces. . . ." A larger standing army, claimed Rapin, was one expedient employed by Charles II in acquiring "absolute power." For views on standing armies, see the writings of John Trenchard, William Pulteney, and James Burgh, with all of which Dickinson was familiar.

<sup>49</sup> For a further discussion of Dickinson's "moderate acquaintance with the English history," see H. Trevor Colbourn, "John Dickinson, Historical Revolutionary," *PMHB*, LXXXIII (1959), 271-292.

all our posterity will repose the same confidence in EVERY prince of the same royal & illustrious house.<sup>50</sup>

I hope my Honourd Mother will excuse my politicks if she cant approve them, & will forgive my dabbling in them, as the English Constitution & the English laws are strictly united. . . .

August 2, 1756

Honourd Father,

. . . This summer I have confind myself chiefly to the reading chancery reports, which I look upon in some measure as the winding up the course of one's studies; that is, not as finishing them, but giving such a complete acquaintance with the whole body of the law that afterwards a man's reading is like travelling again in the same road. The laws of England abstracted from the courts of equity are like a body consisting only of bones & muscles, strong & hardy in the greatest degree but void of that beauty & harmony it has when cloathd with flesh, which, in adorning it, does not detract in the least from its former qualities. The most fond admirer of our common law must allow that there are some cases in which the severity of its rules requires some little softening, in short, that the necessities of human nature are greater than our foresight, & that the most excellent institutions may be extremely just & reasonable in ninety nine instances, & quite defective or improper in the hundredth. Then arises the clamour, & innumerable benefits, the result of the highest wisdom, cant atone for a single error

. . . Quam aut incuria fudit,  
Aut humana parum cavit natura. Hor[ace]<sup>51</sup>

so much more inclinable are we to malice than gratitude. It woud be both inconvenient & unbecoming for the courts of common law to relax anything of their firmness, as their are a thousand duties of sovereign power incompatible with the royal dignity to execute.

<sup>50</sup> This pious observation was commonplace with the political opposition during the early Hanoverian reigns; Bolingbroke had particular cause to emphasize his loyalty in view of his flirtation with the exiled Stuarts. See, for example, Bolingbroke's *On the Spirit of Patriotism* (London, 1775), 37.

<sup>51</sup> "[Blemishes] which either lack of care has produced or against which human nature has been too little cautious." From Horace, *De Arte Poetica*. Dickinson obviously loved to show off his classical learning.



retreated to Gibraltar. Fort St. Philip being thus deserted & reduced to the greatest distress, after a most gallant defence of two months to the immortal honour of General Blakeney,<sup>55</sup> surrendered the 28th of June to Marshall Richlieu. Byng is come home under an arrest, & instead of being tried by a court martial, to satisfy the resentment of the people who suspect some villainy in the Ministry it is said he will be impeached by the House of Commons, & the Parliament will set for that purpose. . . .<sup>56</sup>

August 2, 1756

Honourd Mother,

. . . I have told my Honourd Father of my industry & now permit me to inform you of my diversions. I have not taken many, but as this is the last summer I shall be in England, I design to take a jaunt to Bristol, & I [am] advisd to drink the waters as very serviceable to persons of thin constitution. This will be the only opportunity I shall have of seeing any thing of the country parts of England. Towards winter I shall return to my studies & "*cum hirondine prima*"<sup>57</sup> take my flight for America. There certainly will be a convoy in the spring, & there are so many French sailors taken that all the rest are on board the King's ships, & there will be but few privateers, so that I am under no manner of apprehensions about being taken. The Brest fleet has been blockd up all this summer & has not yet steerd out, but Byng has tarnished all his father's laurels in the Mediterranean.

I hope our affairs in America will be managd better this year than were the last, & that by this time you begin to find the advantage of having a superior commander, whose authority, knowledge & address may turn out united force against the common enemy. I wish Ld. Loudon had saild sooner, but if he had, he probably woud have found himself a general without an army, or perhaps an army without ammunition, for there was such unaccountable negligence & mismanagement in the preparations that his Ldp. was heartily tird

<sup>55</sup> William Blakeney (1672-1761), an ancient gouty professional soldier who defended St. Philip's Castle for seventy days, and was rewarded with an Irish peerage.

<sup>56</sup> Byng was court-martialed in January, 1757, and was shot in March. He died bravely. His execution is still a subject of heated historical debate, but many naval historians argue that Byng was at least guilty of gross negligence in failing to press the attack on the French fleet in May, 1756.

<sup>57</sup> Dickinson again shows off his Latin: "with the first swallow."

of his command before he left England, & was obligd to complain to His Majesty.<sup>58</sup>

I am extremely sorry to find such violent animosities & heats as appear in Pens[ylvani]a papers. It is really melancholy to think of returning to one's country groaning under the double miseries of war & discord, fire & slaughter raging round, & parties & dissensions weakening & distracting us within. How soon do men lose sight of publick good when under the influence of private passion, or which side shall an honest man espouse where both are in the wrong, as constantly is the case when such passion is raisd.

Tench Francis is still in London, & I can perceive very plainly that he is no friend of the governors party. He does not talk so positively of never practizing again as he usd to do. Francis seems to me to be a man who has read too much. His notions are extremely confusd, by perpetual altercation he has got a knack rather than a method of arguing, he has such an important way of hesitating & travelling round a thing that if he spoke less he woud speak better, but if he spoke better he woud not appear so wise to common people as he does. He is far from being a lawyer without his books; with them, he must have merit to be sure from the figure he has made. He has read the Roman history, but does not understand any thing of the civil law nor of their customs. He values himself on being a classick, & I happend one day to say I had read Tacitus this winter, which seemd to surprize him very much; he said there were but 3 or 4 men in Philada coud read it. However, to try my knowledge I believe he artfully mentiond Sallust, of whom I profest myself an admirer; he said he had just bought one & down he brout it (we were at Mr. Bacon's where he lodges) & we turnd to Cæsars famous speech for the conspirators,<sup>59</sup> but we soon differd in our paraphrase & an argument [be]gun on the Roman laws, in which your son "omne tulit punctum,"<sup>60</sup> & tho I had manifestly the advantage of him, yet I observd so well the respect due to his age that I afforded him a decent retreat, & he said after I was gone that I was the most polite scholar of my years he had met with. . . .

<sup>58</sup> See Pargellis, Chap. II.

<sup>59</sup> Refers to the Catiline Conspiracy as described by Sallust. For a popular contemporary translation, see Charles Whibley, ed., *Sallust: The Conspiracy of Catiline and the War of Jugurtha*, translated by Thomas Heywood, 1608 (London, 1924), I, 101-106.

<sup>60</sup> Dickinson modestly claimed he "carried every point."