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Title: Letter from Thomas Cooper to Nassau William Senior

Date: April 1, 1835

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Columbia South Carolina

April 1. 1835

Dear Sir

I received a few days ago by post from Charleston, a pamphlet on National property, transmitted to me by your kind intervention. I thank you for it. I read it with great interest as furnishing important views of some very important questions. The present state of Great Britain, perpetually suggests the propriety of the old advice *festina lente*, otherwise I should have deemed the author timid beyond the mark in doubting about the propriety of considering all Church property as national property, for the reasons assigned by St. James McIntosh in page 92-102 of his *Vindiciae Gallicae*. We are as a people in the U. States superabundantly religious, orthodox, and practically intolerant, but theoretically we adhere to the wholesome doctrine, that Religion being the affair not of this but another state of existence, it is not a proper subject of legislation, or of protection. If it cannot protect itself in the open field of public discussion, it ought to receive no kind or degree of extraneous protection. Very inconsistently, some states admit of prosecutions for blasphemy; but the general feeling is the antient one, *injuria deorum Div. cura*.

I should have liked therefore if the author had given up the aristocratic part of the hierarchy, and provided for a sufficient number of clerical operatives, at a reasonable not parsimonious salary.

But his plan may be necessary to conciliate the younger branches of the privileged orders, at present; I look in a quarter of a century to the downfall of the Establishment, which I regard as a consummation devoutly to be wished. For the same reason, I regard the proposal of a nobility for life, as a measure too temporising, and not on a level with the current opinions most likely to prevail.

Miss Harriet Martineau was with me when I received the Pamphlet and was greatly pleased with it: she has been here for about a week, and will stay here to the end of the present week, when she proceeds to New Orleans. She is entirely with the Durham Ministry, who I hope by the time you receive this letter constitute "the powers that be".

For myself, I am Republican, and therefore more radical than she is. Not that I think our federal republic of the United States is the perfection of the theory, in practice. We have too much government; we have contending local and sectional interests created by nature, which art cannot reconcile. The line of division will before a dozen years are over, be drawn at the Potomac: the sooner the better.

Great and powerful central governments, may be expedient in the present quarrelsome state of the world, but they are wealth-eaters, war-breeders, supported by Idlers, unprincipled, avaricious, full of fraud, fruges consumere nati. We spend here, not with mere extravagance and wanton waste, but wickedly, 24 millions of dollars a year, near 5 million sterling, when half that sum would be beyond our necessities. We have at present an unprincipled, ferocious, vulgar man at our head; a favourite with the people who like a military commander; a weak and womanish propensity. Nor shall we escape from this system of profligate extravagance till the division I have mentioned takes place; which I look to, with anxious hope.

In your country, the time is approaching when the householders paying scot and lot, will demand a convention to frame something like an intelligible Constitution; without guiding their steps by aid of that rotten support, the wisdom of our ancestors. This will take perhaps 30 Years; but Constitutions are undoubtedly coming in fashion.

I have read with great interest two of your Oxford Lectures, and I have long ago ordered the others. But our booksellers here, are very inefficient agents. I am at least six numbers in arrears of Miss Martineau's tales: I shall procure them I suppose a twelve month hence.

You have laid me Dear Sir, under great obligations by the tracts you have been so good as to send me. I trust, the last I have received, will not close the obligations of that kind, which your good will is likely to lay me under.

I send you, a manual of Pol. Economy, not for your perusal, for it is not worth it, but merely to shew you that I am not idle. I am however at present displaced from my Presidency of the College of the State, under circumstances which will be explained in a Pamphlet I now send you. But the Legislature and the Governor last December, conferred on me the honourable duty of recodifying the Laws of the State, remire dispenfiente; and as they assign me a Judge's Salary, I have no reason to complain either of loss of reputation or loss of emolument.

I beg of you Dear Sir to accept my thanks, my kind wishes and respectful salutations.

Thomas Cooper

1. Cooper, Thomas. **HOLOGRAPH LETTER SIGNED, TO NASSAU W. SENIOR**, Columbia, South Carolina, April 1, 1835. Three pages, 4to. In Cooper's small neat hand, with a fine signature. 72 lines, approximately 850 words. In fine condition.

An exceptional letter from Thomas Cooper (1759-1839,) American scientist, political economist, jurist, and educator who emigrated to the United States from England in 1794; written to Nassau William Senior (addressed "Dear Sir"), the leading English political economist in the orthodox mainstream between Ricardo and John Stuart Mill. The letter is important both as an illustration of the intercourse between English and American political economy in the early 19th century, and as an intellectual portrait of Cooper in the closing years of a long and eventful life. Thomas Cooper came to America a Francophile radical; among his first political acts was an attack on the Alien & Sedition laws which earned him imprisonment and a fine. He taught at Carlisle College and the University of Pennsylvania before becoming president of South Carolina College where he taught chemistry and political economy, "in which he was distinctly a pioneer in America" (DAB), from 1820 until his retirement in 1834. From his early incarnation as a freethinker and political radical, Cooper evolved into an ideological conservative during the last two decades of his life, not that he softened his contempt for the religious establishment or his hatred of tyranny--quite the opposite, as this letter reveals. Rather, certain aspects of his political radicalism enabled Cooper to embrace the social conservatism and the states-rights philosophy of the South, the latter, in fact, to an extreme degree. "Though still a foe to tyranny, he defended slavery, repudiated the social philosophy of his old friend Jefferson, and supported with powerful economic argument the Southern position on the tariff. **He became the academic philosopher of states rights and, as a teacher and writer, exerted a profound and lasting influence ... Valuing union too little because he loved liberty too well, he was one of the first to sow the seeds of secession.**"--DAB.

It is difficult to imagine a more quintessential expression of Cooper's ideological transformation than the present letter, which begins by acknowledging the receipt of Senior's pamphlet On national property ... (1835), in which Senior urges the government to restore to the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, by way of confiscation, the revenues of which it was historically dispossessed by the Episcopal Church. Apropos government intervention in religion Cooper says: "We are as a people in the U. States superabundantly religious, orthodox, and practically intolerant, but theoretically we adhere to the wholesome doctrine, that religion being the affair not of this but of another state of existence, it is not a proper subject of legislation, or of protection. If it cannot protect itself in the open field of public discussion, it ought to receive no kind or degree of extraneous protection. Very inconsistently, some states admit of prosecutions for blasphemy; but the general feeling is the ancient one, injuriae deorum Deis curae ... I look in a quarter of a century to the downfall of the (English) Establishment, which I regard as a consummation devoutly to be wished ..." Referring to a visit by Harriet Martineau, who "was with me when I received the pamphlet," Cooper reports that "she is entirely with the Durham Ministry, who I hope by the time you receive this letter constitute 'the powers that be.' For myself, I am Republican, and therefore more radical than she is. Not that I think our federal republic of the United States is the perfection of the theory, in practice. We have too much government; we have contending

local and sectional interests created by nature, which art cannot reconcile. The line of division will before a dozen years are over, be drawn at the Potowmac: the sooner the better. Great and powerful central governments may be expedient in the present quarrelsome state of the world, but they are wealth-eaters, war-breeders, supported by idlers, unprincipled, avaricious, full of fraud ... We spend here, not with mere extravagance and wanton waste, but wickedly, 24 millions of dollars a year, near 5 million sterling, when half that sum would be beyond our necessities. We have at present an unprincipled, ferocious, vulgar man at our head; a favourite with the people who like a military commander; a weak and womanish prosperity. Nor shall we escape from this system of profligate extravagance till the division I have mentioned takes place; which I look to with anxious hope."

Cooper goes on to predict that Senior's countrymen will soon "demand a convention to frame something like an intelligible Constitution; without guiding their steps by aid of that rotten support, the wisdom of our ancestors." He then returns to the exchange of publications: "I have read with great interest two of your Oxford Lectures, and I have long ago ordered the others. But our booksellers here are very inefficient agents. I am at least six numbers in arrears of Miss Martineau's Tales ..." Thanking Senior for sending the tract on National Prosperity, Cooper returns the favor: "I send you a manual of Pol. Economy, not for your perusal, for it is not worth it, but merely to shew you that I am not idle."

Cooper's modesty was unwarranted. His Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy, published in 1826, with a second edition in 1829, was an original synthesis, deeply indebted (as was Senior) to Ricardo--Dorfman called Cooper the "most dramatic of the Ricardians." It served as the first original American text book on political economy and more important, forged a conservative ideology of individualistic laissez-faire that would, like Cooper's states rights philosophy, have long lasting influence. Cooper used the Ricardian theory of rent to justify private property, and he defended free trade and proposed the abolition of the poor law. His thought, refracted through an intimate familiarity with the writings of his contemporaries, would have interested English readers. In fact, the second edition of the Lectures appeared in a London edition in 1831. cf. Dorfman, Economic Mind in American Civilization II, 527-541.

Cooper concludes with an oblique reference to his latest clash with the religious establishment: "I am however at present displaced from my Presidency of the College of the State, under circumstances which will be explained in a pamphlet I now send you. But the Legislature and the Governor last December, conferred on me the honourable duty of reediting the laws of the state ... and as they assign me a judge's salary, I have no reason to complain ..."

Apparently unpublished. While autograph letters from Cooper appear on the market with some regularity, ones with such strong content as this, epitomizing a man of great intellect and achievement in the final phase of his life, are rare.

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