

Jonathan Boucher to George Washington, August 2, 1768, Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers. Published by the Society of the Colonial Dames of America. Edited by Stanislaus Murray Hamilton.

FROM THE REVEREND JONATHAN BOUCHER.

St. MARY'S August 2d. 1768.

SIR

I do not recollect that Mastr. Custis has had any Return of ye. Pain in his Stomach which I told You I suspected to be occasioned by Worms: but as it is but too probable that He may have a little of the Ague & Fever in This or ye. next Month, this Complaint, it is not unlikely, may return; and if it does, in any considerable degree, Dr. Mercer shall be consulted.

Mastr. Custis is a Boy of so exceedingly mild & meek a Temper, that I meant no more by my Fears, than a Doubt that possibly He might be made uneasy by ye. rougher Manners of some of his School fellows. I am pleas'd, however, to find that He seems to be perfectly easy & happy in his new Situation; and as the first Shock is now over, I doubt not but He will continue so. You know how much the Question has been agitated between ye. Advantages of a private & a public Educatn.: & this young G-man has afforded Me Occasion to reflect upon it rather more than I had done before. His Educatn. hitherto may be call'd a private one; & to This perhaps chiefly, He owes that peculiar Innocence & *Sanctity of Manners* wc. are so amiable in Him: but then, is He not, think You, more artless, more unskill'd in a necessary Address, than He ought to be, 'ere He is turned out into a World like This? In a private Seminary his Passions cou'd be seldom aroused: He had few or no Competitors, and therefore cou'd not so advantageously, as in a more

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public Place, be inured to combat those little oppositions & Collisions of Interest, wc. resemble in Miniature the Contests yt. happen in ye. grt. School of ye. World. And let our Circumstances in ye. World be what They will, yet, considering the thousand unavoidable Troubles that human Nature is Heir to, This is a part of Educatn. tho' seldom attended to, wc. I think of more Importance than almost all ye. Rest. When Children are taught betimes to bear Misfortunes & cross Accidents wth. becomg. Fortitude, one half of ye. Evils of Life, wth. wc. others are dejected, afflict not Them. Educatn. is too generally considered merely as yr. Acquisin. of Knowledge, & ye. Cultivan. of ye. intellectual Powers: And agreeably to this Notion, wn. We speak of a Man well-educated, We seldom mean more than that He has been well instructed in those Languages wc. are ye. Avenues to Knowledge. But surely, this is but a partial & imperfect Acct. of it: & ye. Aim of Educatn. shd. be not only to form wise but good Men, not only to cultivate ye. Understanding, but to expand ye. Heart, to meliorate ye. Temper, & *fix ye. gen'rous Purpose in ye. glowing Breast.* But whether This can best be Done, in a private or public School, is a Point, on wc. so much may be said on both Sides, that I confess myself still undetermined. Yr. Son came to Me teeming wth. all ye. softer Virtues: but then I thought, possess'd as He was of all ye. Harmlessness of ye. Dove, He still wanted some of ye. Wisdom of ye. Serpent: And This, by ye. Oeconomy of my Family he will undoubtedly sooner acquire than at Home. But then, how will You forgive Me shd. I suffer Him to lose in Gentleness, Simplicity, & Inoffensiveness, as much as He gains in Address, Prudence, & Resolun.? And I must assure You fm. Experience, that This is a Dilemma by no means so Easily avoided in Practice, as it may seem to be in Theory. Upon the Whole, however, I can honestly give it as my Opinion, (& as it must give You & Mrs. Washington much comfort & Pleasure to hear it I hope You will not suspect yt. I wd. be so mean as to say so, if I did not think so) that I have not seen a Youth that I think promises fairer to be a good & useful Man than John Custis! 'Tis true, he is far fm. being a brilliant Genius, but This so far from being considered as a Reflection upon Him, ought rather to give You pleasure. Parents are generally partial to grt. Vivacity & Springhtliness of Genius in thr. Children; whereas I think, that there cannot be a Symptom less expressive of future Judgement & Solidity: as it

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seems thoroughly to preclude not only Depth of Penetran. but yt. Attenn. & Applican. wc. are so essentially requisite in ye. Acquisin. of Knowledge. It is, if I may use ye. Simile of a Poet, a busy Bee, whose whole Time passes away in mere Flight fm. Flower to Flower, witht. restg. upon Any a sufft. Time to gather Honey.

He will Himself inform You of ye. Accident He lately met with; and as He seems to be very apprehensive of yr. Displeasure, cd. I suppose it necessary, I wd. urge You & his Mamma to spare Rebukes, as much as He certainly deserves Them. Mrs. Washington may believe Me that He is now perfectly well. He seemed to expect Me to employ a Doctr., but as He met with ye. Accident by his own indiscren., & as I saw there was no Danger, I thought it not amiss not to indulge Him. The calling in a Physician upon every trifling Occasion, I think, is too likely to render Children needlessly timorous & Cowardly.

I did not misunderstand ye. Meaning of yr. Request,¹ in ye. Matter wherein You suspect I possibly might; being persuaded that You know as well as I do, that such pr.ticular Attention is not only unnecessary, but impracticable. He will probably inherit a much more considerable Fortune, than any other Boy here; and I thought it by no means an improper or unreasonable Request that a pr.ticular Attenn. shd. be bestowed on a Youth of his Expectan. But as any Partiality to Him in ye. trifling Circumstances of his Diet, or other Accommodans. wd. be rather disservicable than otherwise, I have taught Him not to expect it. The only pr.ticular Attenn. You cd. wish for, I also think Him entitled to; & that is, a more vigilant Attenn. to ye. Propriety & Decorum of his Behavr., & ye. restraining Him fm. many Indulgences, wc. I shd. willingly allow pr.haps to anor. Boy, whose Prospects in Life do not require such exalted Sentemts. yt. allowg. Him more frequently to sit in my Company, & being more careful of ye. Company of Those, who might probably debase or taint his Morals. — Had I my Choice, believe me, it wd. be more agreeable to Me to superintend ye. Educatn. of two or three promisg. Lads, than to lead a Life of ye. most voluptuous Indolence: but the Truth is, oblig'd as I was to engage in it by Necessity, & not by Choice, I have often found myself so ill requited, & ye. office itself considered as so low,

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& so often taken up by ye. very lowest Fellows one knows of, that after having laboured in it for upwards of seven Years, with. havg. added much either to my Fortune or Reputation, I am almost resolv'd to drop it entirely. Yet, whilst it continues to be agreeable to You to let Mastr. Custis remain wth. Me, it will be a Pleasure to Me to have ye. Managemt. of Him, nor can I indeed come to any decisive Resolun. as to ye. other Matter, till I know more certainly ye. Fate of my Expectans. in Maryland.

Be so obliging as to find some speedy & safe Conveyance for a Lr. to Mr. Addison, wc. I take ye. Liberty of recommendg. to yr. pr.ticular Care, as it might be of much Detriment to Me, shd. it fall into ill Hands as has been ye. Case once before.

I beg Pardon for this very tedious Letter, wc. I have taxed You wth. ye. Perusal of, and, wth. Mine & my Sister's Compts. to Mrs. Washington

I am, Sr. Yr. most Obedt. & most Hble Servt. JONAN. BOUCHER.

1 That Doctor Boucher might give to his (Washington's) ward a "peculiar care," "as he is a promising boy, the last of his family, and will inherit a large fortune."