

James Madison to Frederic Beasley, December 22, 1824. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO FREDERICK BEASLEY. MAD. MSS.

Montpellier, Virginia, Dec. 22, 1824

Revd. Sir, I have just received your letter of the 13th, on its return from Charlottesville, and wish I could gratify you with all the information it asks. In place of it, I can only observe that the System of Polity for the University of Virginia being not yet finally digested & adopted I cannot venture to say what it will be in its precise form and details. It is probable that instead of a President or Provost, as chief magistrate, the superintending & Executive duties, so far as not left to the individual Professors over their respective Classes, will be exercised by the Faculty; the Professors presiding in rotation. This regulation however, as experimental, will be at all times alterable by the Board of Visitors. The Code of discipline will be prepared with the aid of all the lights that can be obtained from the most distinguished Seminaries; and some of the innovations will, not improbably, be in the spirit of your judicious observations. As the University, being such in the full extent of the term, will not contain boys under sixteen years of age, and be chiefly filled by youths approaching to manhood, with not a few perhaps arrived at it there is the better chance for self-government in the students, and for the co-operation of many in giving efficacy to a liberal and limited administration.

The peculiarity in the Institution which excited first, most attention & some animadversion, is the omission of a Theological Professorship. The Public Opinion seems now to have

Library of Congress

sufficiently yielded to its incompatibility with a *State* Institution, which necessarily excludes sectarian Preferences. The best provision which occurred, was that of authorizing the Visitors to open the Public rooms

for Religious uses, under *impartial* regulations, (a task that may occasionally involve some difficulties) and admitting the establishment of Theological Seminaries by the respective sects contiguous to the precincts of the University, and within the reach of a familiar intercourse distinct from the obligatory pursuits of the Students. The growing Village of Charlottesville also is not distant more than a mile, and contains already Congregations & Clergymen of the sects to which the students will mostly belong.

You have already noticed in the public Prints the Scientific Scope of the University, and the resort to Europe for some of the Professors. The reasons for the latter step, you may have also seen in Print; as well as the reduction of the number of chairs in the first instance, by annexing Plural functions to some of them. This was rendered necessary by the limited resources, as yet granted by the Legislature, and will be varied as fast as an augmentation of these will permit, by dividing & subdividing the branches of Science now in the same group. Several of the Professors remain to be appointed; among them one for Mental Philosophy including the branches to which you refer. This has always been regarded by us as claiming an important place in so comprehensive a School of Science. The gentleman in prospect for the station is not yet actually engaged.

You seem to have allotted me a greater share in this undertaking than belongs to me. I am but one of seven Managers, and one of many pecuniary benefactors. Mr. Jefferson has been the great projector & the mainspring of it.

I am sorry that I have never been able to give the volume you kindly favored me with, the reading it doubtless deserves; and I fear that however congenial the task would be with studies relished at former periods, I shall find it difficult to reconcile it with demands on my time, the decrease of which does not keep pace with the contraction of its remaining

Library of Congress

span. From several dips into the Treatise I think myself authorized to infer that it embraces a scrutinizing & systematic view of the subject, interesting to the best informed, and particularly valuable to those who wish to be informed.

I thank you Sir for the friendly sentiments you have expressed, and beg to accept with my great respect a cordial return of them.