16: 1812 September 12: William Dunbar "Son" (Princeton) to "My Dear Mother"

William Dunbar
My Dear Mother

I have now got your last letters. I am sorry you attribute my gloominess to such unfavorable causes. If I had believed that I should have involved myself in such a labyrinth, I never should have written on this subject. If you had continued to follow this out, your letter, I should now have been perfectly satisfied. But as you soon laid that aside, I am induced to believe that you conjectured something more serious than what is reason to be. I spoke of this disposition of mind, hoping that justification might enable you to draw therefrom some traits of my character, which you seemed desirous of knowing. I hope however you will treat it lightly & laugh at it; I do most seriously imagine that there is scarcely a young man of my age that is not at times afflicted for the future, either with respect to tortures or good figures in the world. I hope you will believe that I have either exaggerated my malady in my description, or else that my peculiar situation is calculated to render me a little more gloomy than most other persons. It is true, I look forward to this time when it shall devolve upon me to be the protector of my dear mother & my two sweet sisters & my darling little brother; in other words when I shall be placed in the midst of life, it is to be had on this Earth. But you will certainly allow that, learning & accomplishments, in this case, increase the climate, and render every thing compelle.
The word "meaning" has caused me some uneasiness, I will
until I shall have believed that this letter has reached you.
In the first place, tho it may appear to you, that the ladies
whom I associate here is certainly, of the first respectability in
the United States. Of this stamp there is, is you may suppose,
a very narrow circle in Princeton. As these names would
be strange to you, I shall only mention the Family of Doctor
Smith. Whatever may be implied by the above word with
you, this contraction which is put upon its face, by so many
disgraceful or detrimental, to a person's understanding, shows
this much, that young men of the finest talent in college
have been called guizical, & I do not know that I ever heard
it applied to a fool, except it was to myself. I hope I have
to been left so totally destitute by nature, as not prevented
when I am made, the laughing-stock of a company, and
to not be able to sustain my role in such a manner, as to
make it appear that I am not altogether a fool; for I
must confess that I have no pretensions to any thing above
the common. However, my dear mother, to evoke my affections
in the beginning of this letter, I begin to be really glad of that things have
turned out as they have. It has been the means of your writing me a
most instructive letter. I assure you. I have preserved all your letters
most carefully & shall ever respect your opinions considering them
the proper guide for all young men. You may be sure I have read
all the letters written by our dear father to Mr. Vaughan, he invariably
gave time to me for reading after reading them himself. I shall
read thus again as it has been long since I saw them. I esteem them very very valuable since he has left this world & I take it for
one of an unaccountable kind in treating of his writing, because
I feel as if I were preencouraging a part of himself —
I am persuaded that you will not please with this letter & I know
myself when you give good reasons for failure. I expect you hold me
in the light of one who is fervent endeavoring to excuse himself for his
faults, & to render himself apparently perfect. I will always
allow of many failings; and when they are pointed out & remarked up-
now, I am to considerably benefit that I am rejoiced at the cause
for observation; for very probably if they had not been noticed
they might have been again apparently real under the impres-
sion of perfect propriety. Thadeus says once that he was
not sorry to see young people make blunders, when they were placed
in a situation to be rectified of them, because it is the only means
of rendering them perfect in respects in which they are deficient; a
very just remark indeed. — I believe my impression respecting
novels conveyed for I intended it to convey the idea that I intend
read them; and this is certainly the case; you will never have to
send me for throwing away my lines, & Activating my imagination &
the expense of my letters, because, in reading books which are all
expensive to my sister, sonnets, in verse, short-sight & hair-bread
epistles more of love, or love-scenes, sincere, simple, weighty, & heart-speed
repinings more of love. Here your advice me such

'precise'. Above all, dear mother, please Shew your advice me such

of

a lucrative. Don Quixote as to he, enamored with some imaginary

one who probably never existed. — I wished to have read the book

you recommended before I mentioned it in my letter; but I have

not been able as yet to read it, not being in town. I look forward

with pleasure to the time when I shall read it because you have recomended it. In the mean time believe that my heart is all at

home. From your affectionate love,

William Duncan
When I signed my name at the bottom of the last page I did not intend entirely to conclude, but to wait for another to write before I close the letter. As I said in a former letter that Dr. Smith intended to, so he has resigned his place as president. Dr. McLean has also resigned, so that the two principal officers of the college have left us; however, their places are admirably well filled by Dr. Greene prof. W. & Dr. Mc-
row, vice-pres. The Doctor's salary will be continued this abridged to 1500$. With this he will live retiring from the world. It is not probable therefore that any anticipations on that head can be un-
dermined. Our old school master, John Smith was in Princeton a few days ago. I presume you a cordial meeting took place between us.

I sent, when I enjoyed so much satisfaction as I did in his company, that all the remarkable occasions were related which appeared not a little to the food for both thought & talk. He is really an exceptional

- minded man & I think, a very sensible man. He said very

seriously, that he should like to see the old school-house, that it

sufficient to give you an idea of his goodness of heart. But what

will impress you is that little Ancey was present. He said he

me a visit with Mr. Patterson who came on to spend a day,

two with a relations, you may conceive how rejoiced Mr. Smith

see him. Where he taught to say his A.B.c. I trusted him all that

was worth seeing & I believe he was pleased, for he would not

the one to, the which gives you an account of his visits. Mr. Smith

has gone a little distance to the South, but will return shortly;

I will not however ask him if he has thought of returning to his

friends in such a manner as to give him to understand that a visit

is wanted. I shall write to hear what you have wrote to

to say upon this subject. I am to correspond with him.

Let this be a supplement to this letter I must observe here, that the word

"surgical" although not authorized by dictionaries is among such as accord-

ing to many this word may be used with certain qualifications. That the lad

of whom I spoke, so highly was old enough to be my grand mother's mother's mother's mother. 