


1812

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

William Dunbar

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My Dear mother

Princeton 12th Sep^r 1812

I have now got your 2 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 joke thro' out your letter, I should now have been perfectly satisfied. But as you soon said that, aside I am induced to believe that you conjectured something more serious than there is reason to be. I spoke of this disposition of mind, hoping that penetration 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 fortune or good figure 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 the time when it shall devolve upon me to be the protector of my dear mother, my two sweet sisters & my darling little brother, or in other words when I shall be placed in the midst of a ^{family} it is to be had on this Earth; But you will certainly ^{only} allow that learning & accomplishments in this case crown the climax, and render every thing complete. I who am nothing extraordinary, am naturally fearful that tolerable eminence is difficult of access, therefore it may

that I am in some degree more serious than my fellows.

The word "Quizical" has caused me some uneasiness, & will
untill I shall have believed that this letter has reached you.
In the first place tho' let me assure you that the Ladies with
whom I associate are certainly of the first respectability in
the United States. Of this stamp there is, as you may suppose,
a very narrow circle in Princeton. As this name would
be strange to you I shall only mention the Family of Doctor
Smith. - Whatever may be implied by the above word, with
you, the construction that is put upon it here is by no means
disgracefull or detrimental, to a person's understanding. I know
this much that young men of the finest talents in Europe
have been called quizical, & I do not know that I ever heard
it applied to a fool, except it was to myself, & I hope I have
not been left so totally destitute by nature, as not ^{to} perceive
when I am made, the laughing-stock of a company, and
not ^{to} be able to sustain my roll in such a manner, as to
make it appear that I am not altogether a Dunces; tho' I
must confess that I have no pretensions to any thing above
the common. - However, my dear mother, to awake my affection
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 sacredly & 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 them to me for perusal, after reading them himself. I shall

read them again as it has been long since I saw them. I esteem
them very, very valuable since he has left this world & I take a pleas-
-ure of an unaccountable kind in treasuring up his writings, because
I feel as if I were preserving a part of himself. -

I am fearful that you will not ^{be} pleased with this letter & I throw
myself upon your great goodness for pardon. I expect you ^{will} behold me
in the light of one who is, forever endeavoring, to excuse himself for his
faults, & to render himself apparently perfect. I ^{am} willing always
to allow of many failings; and when they are pointed out & remarked up-
-on, I am so considerably benefited that I am rejoiced at the cause
for observation; for very probably if they had not been noticed
they might have been again apparent, and under the impres-
-sion of perfect propriety. I heard papa say once, that he was
not sorry to see young people make blunders, when they were placed
in a situation to be reminded 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 expression respecting
novels conveyed, for I intended it to convey the idea that I seldom
read them; and this is certainly the case; you will never have to
scold me for throwing away my time, & boasting my imagination at
the expense of my better powers, in reading books which are all
reputations, more or less, of love-scenes, moon-shine-sights & hair-bread
"scapes". Above all, dear mother, never suspect your, believe me such
a lunatic Don Quixote as to be enamoured ^{of} some imaginary hero
ine 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, ^{it} not being in town. I look forward
with pleasure to the time when I shall read it because you have re-
-commended it. In the mean time believe that my heart is all at
home, From yours affectionate Son William Dunbar

When I signed my name at the bottom of the last page I did not intend
entirely to conclude, but to wait for another ^{opportunity} to write before I closed
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. Green pres. & Dr. Mc-
Loud vice pres. - The Doctor's salary will be continued tho' abridged
to 1500\$. With this he will live, retiring from the world. It is not
probable therefore that ~~any~~ ^{our} anticipations on that head can be real-
ized. - Our old school-master, John Smith was in Princeton a few
days ago. I assure you a cordial meeting took place between ^{us}. I do
not ^{know} when I enjoyed so much satisfaction as I did in his conversa-
tion. All boyish occurrences were recalled which afforded not a lit-
tle food for both thought & talk. He is really an affectionate
& good man & I think a very sensible man. He said very
seriously that he should like to see the Old School-house; that is
sufficient to give you an idea of his goodness of heart. But what
will surprise you is that little Archy was present. He paid
me a visit, with Mr. & Mrs. Patterson who came over to spend a day or
two with a relation, you may conceive how rejoiced Mr. Smith ^{was} to
see him, whom he taught to say his A. B. C. I showed him all that
was worth seeing, & I believe he was pleased, for he would not tell
me so. He will give you an account of his trip. Mr. Smith
has gone a little distance to the South, but will return shortly.
I will not however ask him if he has thoughts of returning to our
parts, in such a manner as to give him to understand that a teach-
er is wanted. I will ~~we~~ shall wait & hear what you have farther
to say upon this subject. I am to correspond with him. -

As a supplement to this letter I would observe here, that the word
"surgical" altho' not authorized by dictionaries is among such, as accord-
ing to many of the world, may be used with certain qualifications. That the lady
I whom I spoke so highly of was old enough to be my grand mother. - Newton philosopher the world