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Thomas Nelson

John Adams: Diary, 15 September 1775

Nelson is a fat Man, like the late Coll. Lee of Marblehead. He is a Speaker, and alert and lively, for his Weight.

St. George Tucker to James Monroe, Williamsburg, Va., 15 December 1793

Our friend Nelson has leisure for every purpose: he is retired, and thinks more than he speaks or writes. Could you stimulate him to take up the pen, I should flatter myself the champions of the other side would find in him a formidable antagonist: but I fear his inactivity. The *vis inertiae* is not more powerful in its Operation on any of our friends than on him.

William Nelson

St. George Tucker to James Monroe, Williamsburg, Va., 15 December 1793

Our friend Nelson has leisure for every purpose: he is retired, and thinks more than he speaks or writes. Could you stimulate him to take up the pen, I should flatter myself the champions of the other side would find in him a formidable antagonist: but I fear his inactivity. The *vis inertiae* is not more powerful in its Operation on any of our friends than on him.

Charles Nesbit

Benjamin Rush to John Witherspoon, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1 August 1767

I love the man's character and am charmed with his disinterestedness. . . . We may still recommend Mr. Nesbet as a professor of the languages or any branch of learning he is best qualified to teach. . . . A gentleman of Mr. Nesbet's pregnant genius would soon ripen for the highest charge [2 missing words] and what place so proper for him in the new world as the College?

Benjamin Rush to John Montgomery, Philadelphia, 14 June 1785

Dr. Nisbet expects to see you on Saturday or Monday next. He is impatient to see the place where he is to end his days. I cannot tell you how many friends he has made in our city. His preaching is sensible and elegant, and his conversation and agreeable manner charm everybody. In a letter which I received by him from one of my correspondents in Scotland, he has these words, "I follow Dr. Nisbet with solicitude across the ocean. Such another man you will not soon be able to select and carry from us. He is a moving library. He is a Greek and Latin scholar to whom we have few to compare. He is still more distinguished for his command of modern languages. His

reading is extensive, his memory vigorous, his discernment quick, his judgment sound. In theology he is a sound Calvinist, in politics a thorough whig, in heart—an American.”

This I believe is the Doctor’s true character. I am so chained down to his company that I regret leaving him for a moment to attend my business. Indeed, my friend, in the arrival of Dr. Nisbet I conceive a new sun is risen upon Pennsylvania. His whole soul is set upon doing good, and his capacity for it has seldom I believe been exceeded by any man’s in this country.

Benjamin Rush to John Montgomery, Philadelphia, 28 November 1785

I hear from a variety of reports and private accounts that Tom Nisbet has changed his mind, and that it is probable the Doctor will not return to Scotland. Poor man, I have constantly considered *him* as *insane*, his wife as *foolish*, and his son Tom as *worse* than both. . . . He has treated me cruelly, and his son still worse—but I freely forgive them both, and if they mend their manners and if the Doctor will do his duty and give over whining and complaining, I shall love and serve him as much as if nothing had happened.

John Armstrong to George Washington, Carlisle, Pa., 2 March 1787

In Our New College began at this place, the professors are punctual, men of regularity & good Scholars. I often secretly wish you acquainted with our Principal Dr. Nisbet, from Montrose in Scotland—he is a man of plain manner, a kind of walking library—speaks several of the modern, as well as the dead languages—of quick discernment & sound judgment—a great republican, but decidedly in favor of Coercive power in the Executive body, more especially as ours are elective.

John Armstrong to George Washington, Carlisle, Pa., 20 February 1788

I hope Dr. Nisbet’s discourse on literature & address to the Students of this College [i.e., Dickinson College] has met your approbation—he is a good man, a great Scholar, a kind of moving library, with as little vanity or parade on the whole, as any man I ever Saw—yet I am afraid thro’ the weakness of our funds, that we must Lose him, as unable to pay his Salary with the various other expenses. This College was precipitately undertaken, and the present scarcity of money not sufficiently foreseen, deters many from sending their children abroad tho’ the College & boarding which includes Washing makes but 32£ a year. If our New Congress should think of a Federal University, Dr. Nisbet would be the man to lay the foundation of it, but this appears to be at some distance.

Charles Nesbit to Alexander Addison, Carlisle, Pa., 29 September 1791

I know that my Ideas of the French Revolution are not fashionable here, but it has been my fate to have been always a Minority Man on both Sides of the Globe, except during the short Administration of Lord Rockingham.

Benjamin Rush: Commonplace Book, 17 January 1804

Died at Carlisle the Revd. Chas. Nesbet, Principal of the College at that place, aged 66. He was, in knowledge, a walking Library. He knew a great deal of many, and a little of all subjects. His knowledge was derived from books that few people read, and that many people never heard of. This was owing to a peculiar circumstance. He lived next door to a pastry Cook at Montrose in

Scotland, who used to import old Books from London by the barrel, to put their leaves under his pies. Before he tore them up he permitted Dr. Nesbet to look over them, and to take such as he wanted at a trifling price for his own use. These books the Doctor read, and from them extracted a great deal of his rare and uncommon knowledge. He was an excellent companion, and his conversation overflowed with wit, humor, and instructing anecdotes. Unhappily he was, like Dr. [William] Smith, of a querulous disposition, and more disposed to find fault than to praise. His usefulness to Society was by no means proportioned to his uncommon abilities and extensive knowledge. He rather resembled a fountain, which poured forth streams in a royal garden for the amusement of spectators than a rich and copious stream that fertilized in its course an extensive country. He died, it was said, of a broken heart, occasioned by the bad conduct of his eldest son, who was a notorious drunkard, and who, in a fit of insanity produced by it, struck his father.

George Nicholas

Thomas Jefferson to Isaac Zane, Richmond, Va., 24 December 1781

The trifling body who moved this matter* was below contempt; he was more an object of pity. His natural ill-temper was the tool worked with by another hand [i.e., Patrick Henry]. He was like the minnows which go in and out of the fundament of the whale. But the whale himself was discoverable enough by the turbulence of the water under which he moved.

*Nicholas had moved in the Virginia House of Delegates to investigate Jefferson for misconduct while he served as governor.

Edmund Randolph to James Madison, Richmond, Va., 29 March 1783

Colo. Nicholas . . . has the murmur of the people strongly in his favor [for election to the Virginia House of Delegates].

John Marshall to James Monroe, Richmond, Va., 12 December 1783

Since the rejection of the bill introduced by Taylor [in the Virginia legislature], Colo. Nicholas (a politician not famed for hitting a medium) introduced one admitting into this Country every species of Men except natives who had borne arms against the state.

David Stuart to George Washington, Richmond, Va., 25 December 1786

Since my last, nothing material has happened here, except that the bill establishing district Courts is lost—As the prompt administration of justice, is perhaps the best sumptuary law which can be established in any Country, and the best means of securing prosperity to the people, I lament much that it could not take place—I am sorry to say, that Mr. G. Nicholas who appears to be aiming at popularity in all his measures, was the cause of its miscarriage.

Bushrod Washington to George Washington, Richmond, Va., 7 June 1788

[In the Virginia ratifying Convention.] Mr. Nicholas concluded the day with a very powerful speech, inferior to none that had been made before as to close and connected argument.

James Nicholson

George Lux to Nathanael Greene, Baltimore, Md., 28 September 1779

I take the liberty of requesting from you recommendatory letters introducing Capt. Nicholson as a Gentleman, a good Seaman, and a Man of Honor: he is of genteel and considerable Family on the Eastern Shore of our State.

Joshua Seney to George Washington, 22 June 1789

I have long been acquainted with the Family of Commodore James Nicholason, and frequently seen him, in Maryland; have often heard Sentiments highly favorable to his merit, expressed by Gentlemen of that State, and have reason to believe, he was generally esteemed by those who knew him, as a private Citizen, a Patriot and as an useful Officer. I have personally known the Commodore for some time past, and experienced in him, an amiable disposition and an upright Character.

John Nixon

John Adams to Samuel Holden Parsons, Philadelphia, 11 August 1776

Nixon is brave, but has not a large Mind that I can learn.

William North

Nathaniel Gorham to James Bowdoin, New York, 22 October 1786

The affairs of the Western Country are in such a state as to induce Congress to propose an augmentation of the Troops—a considerable number of which are assigned to Massachusetts—if the General Court should agree to raise them; good Officers will be necessary. I presume your Excellency will have the best information on this head & I wish not to offer my poor advice upon the occasion—but justice to the character of Major North who is going to Boston induces me to mention him to your Excellency as a Gentm. who supports the fairest reputation—and is spoken of—by all the military Men as an excellent Officer.

Robert Livingston to James Duane, Manor Livingston, N.Y., 13 February 1788

Yours always agreeable Letter of the 7 Current was delivered me yesterday by Major North who is a Genteel young man.

William North to James Duane, Duanesburgh, N.Y., 8 May 1788

I have read Blackstone, but I know nothing, nor never shall know anything about Law.

Joseph Nourse

Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, Philadelphia, 17 April 1791

In contemplating the appointment of the Auditor [Oliver Wolcott, Jr.] as Comptroller, a question naturally arises concerning a substitute for the former. In forming your Judgment on this point you would probably desire to know what may be the pretensions of the next officer in the department below the Auditor namely the Register. I say nothing of the Assistant Secretary or the Treasury, because neither of them I presume would think the place of Auditor an eligible exchange for that which he now has & because I regard them both as distinct & irrelative branches of the department. The Register is a most excellent officer in his place. He has had a great deal of experience in the department, is a perfect accountant & a very upright man. But I cannot say that I am convinced he would make as good an Auditor as he does a Register. I fear he would fail on the score of firmness & I am not sure that his mind is formed for a systematic adherence to principle. I believe at the same time that he is perfectly content to remain here he is.

Jeremiah Olney

Alexander Hamilton to Jeremiah Olney, Philadelphia, 2 April 1793

You will receive by this opportunity an official Letter. The present you will consider as a private and friendly one.

You will readily believe me, when I assure you, that all my prepossessions are in your favor, and that if there have been any faults on your side, I am ready to ascribe them to the *excesses* of virtues and good qualities, rather than to their *opposites*.

But you will, I am sure, consider it as an act of friendship when I tell you that some good men, who esteem you and think highly of your conduct, in the main, have expressed to me an idea that it has been in some instances too *punctilious*, and not sufficiently accommodating.

I am aware that in a scene where they have been accustomed to much relaxation, a spirit of exactness is particularly necessary, and that *only* a due degree of it may seem rigor. And I have thus construed the intimations alluded to.

But on the other hand I have considered it as possible that your ideas of precise conformity to the laws, may have kept you from venturing upon relaxations in cases in which, from *very special* circumstances, they may have been proper.

My own maxims of conduct are not favorable to much discretion, but cases do sometimes occur in which a little may be indispensable. The exercise of it must always be at the peril of the officer, and therefore ought to stand on manifest ground. But wherever it should appear to have been discreetly and prudently exercised, upon an *urgent* occasion, due allowances would be made for it.

I should be cautious in making such a remark to many officers—because I should fear an abuse—but with you, I have no apprehension, as I am sure your bias is, as it ought to be, towards a strict execution of the laws and your instructions.

The good will of the Merchants is very important in many senses, and if it can be secured without any improper sacrifice or introducing a looseness of practice, it is desirable to do it. Tis impossible for me to define the degree of accommodation which will avoid one extreme or another. This your own judgment, as *special* cases arise, must point out to you. I only mean to convey to you a general sentiment.

Jeremiah Olney to Alexander Hamilton, Providence, R.I., 22 April 1793

By the last Post I acknowledged the receipt of your confidential, and very Friendly Letter of the 2nd Instant, and I embrace the first leisure moment to express my Gratitude, and return my sincere Thanks for the kindness of the motives which prompted you to write it.

Your flattering approbation of my official Conduct in general, and the intimation you have been pleased to give of the great confidence you have in my Intentions, afford me the sincerest satisfaction; and I hope my future Behavior, as a public officer, will furnish you with no cause to alter your good opinion, I will at least *endeavor* that it shall not.

Your acquainting me, in this *private* manner, with the “Idea of some good Men who have expressed to you that in some Instances, my conduct has been too punctilious, and not sufficiently accommodating,” I esteem an unequivocal proof of your Regard; and which is greatly enhanced by your favorable construction of those intimations. On this point I beg leave, Dear Sir, respectfully to observe, that it is more than probable the introduction of punctuality and exactness, in the execution of the revenue Laws, may appear to some Gentlemen like vigor; especially when it is considered, and which I assert as a Fact, that the Merchants in General, in this District, were *before* strangers to an honorable punctuality and exactness, as they respected the collection and payment of the Duties imposed by the State Legislature; for it is a well known Truth, that the Merchants paid but little regard to the law when it clashed with their Interest; and that the officers of the Customs being annually chosen, were perfectly under their control; hence they were permitted to make such Entries as they pleased (very seldom exceeding half the cargoes) to regard the law in other respects (particularly in *altering registers at their pleasure &c.*) so far only as it suited their own convenience; and to clear out their Vessels even on the Sabbath! It is therefore, easy to conceive, that so great a change, in being suddenly restricted from this *pleasing* liberty, is the real and only source of the illiberal and unmerited Censure against me.

I have never ventured to exercise a discretionary power in the execution of the Duties of my office, not authorized, by the Law or your instructions; because I considered it dangerous to establish a precedent, which might, from the imperfection of human nature, of which perhaps, I possess too great a share, led me beyond the line of Prudence and my Duty to the public. But Sir, since you have been pleased to place such confidence in me, as to permit a *discreet* exercise of it, on urgent occasions, I will venture upon the expedient, with great caution, as those occasions may arise, taking peculiar care to execute every *essential* part of the Law. With such views I shall not doubt but your candor will induce you to make every allowance for any unintentional deviation from the law in my exercise of Discretion.

The good will of the Merchants is very important and desirable, as you observe; and it shall be secured, if a fair and Just discharge of my duty will obtain it: indeed, I possess it already, from a greater part of the Gentlemen.

Samuel Osgood

Abigail Adams to John Adams, 21 July 1783

Mr. Osgood is a sensible modest Man. When he came from Congress, I wished to see him, and he was introduced to me. I made some Inquiry of him respecting the situation of my Friend. Ever since that time he has taken it into his head to be vastly civil to me. I told him I wished he would write you a state of publick affairs. He said he had not the honour of being personally known to you. I promised to introduce him to you, and he has promised to write you, if he goes again to Congress, of which he appears at present doubtful. The House passed a most pointed censure upon him by recalling all their Delegates at once, but when they cooled upon reflection, and Mr. Dalton refused they chose Mr. Osgood again. I know I cannot recommend him more, than by saying, he appears to me a second Mr. Gerry.

Jacob Read to Annis Stockton, Annapolis, Md., 1 February 1784

Osgood goes to balls & dances *like any kind of thing* but faugh! The beast still Chews that *vile wad Tobacco*.

Manasseh Cutler: Journal, 24 July 1787

Spent the evening with Mr. Osgood, President of the Board of Treasury, who appeared to be very solicitous to be fully informed of our plan. No gentleman has a higher character for planning and calculating than Mr. Osgood.

Manasseh Cutler: Journal, 26 July 1787

Mr. Osgood desired me to dine with him. . . . I had been repeatedly assured Mr. Osgood was my friend, and that he had censured Congress for not consenting to the terms I had offered; but such is the intrigue and artifice which is often practiced by men in power, that I felt very suspicious, and was as cautious as possible. . . . Mr. Osgood made many valuable observations. The extent of his information astonished me. His views of the Continent and of Europe were so enlarged that he appeared to be a perfect master of every subject of this kind.

Otto's Biographies, Fall 1788

Former delegate from Massachusetts, frank, honest, intelligent, and hard-working. Slightly attached to the Eastern Party. An interesting conversationalist, but uncouth in his manners.

Eleazer Oswald

Mathew Carey: *The Plagi-Scurriliad*, 1786

[His writings are] the ravings of a lunatic, and the abuse of a Billingsgate fishwoman—instead of the argument of a scholar or man of genius—or the politeness of a gentleman. . . .

Independent of your being regularly initiated master of the arts I here treat of [plagiarism* and scurrility], the unnumbered amiable qualities you are endowed with—your sacred inviolable regard for truth—your love of harmony and concord—your indulgence for the failings of your neighbours—your generous hospitality towards strangers newly arrived here—the harmony of your stile—the terseness and conviction of your arguments—the refinement, elegance and chastity of your language—your readiness to acknowledge and make atonement for the errors you fall into—your candid and ingenuous disposition—your gentle condescension—your hatred of the character of a bully or drawcansir—In fine, your being, as the poet sings—“The noblest work of God”—

*He borrows by *wholesale*, and his alterations are confined merely to adapt the articles to his particular purpose.

Charles Tillinghast to Hugh Hughes, New York, 12 October 1787

Oswald, was the only Printer who *dare* print the address of the seceding Members [of the Pennsylvania Assembly] to their Constituents:—some of the *new Constitution* Gentry waited on him, and told him, that if he published *such pieces*, they would withdraw their subscriptions; He replied, that they were very welcome, if they would first be pleased to discharge arrearages; for that whatever might be his *own sentiments*, yet his *Press was Free*, and he would *support its Freedom*—They knew him too well not to be convinced that he would not be frightened by any Threats which they might make use of, or it is highly probable, they would have held out to him some kind of Punishment.

“Tiffany,” *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 13 March 1788

Eleazer means to die hard, we find from his paper of this morning. . . . As to his complaint that attempts have been made to injure his paper and thereby to distress his family, I am sorry to say that the blame lies at his own door; let him ask his own conscience who has attempted the ruin of his rising family? The answer must be—that himself by his perverse conduct has done it.

Henry Chapman to Stephen Collins, New York, 20 June 1788

That restless firebrand the Printer of Your City is running about as if driven by the Devil seemingly determined to do all the mischief he can indeed. In my Opinion he is an actual Incendiary and ought to be the object of legal restraint, he is in his own person a strong argument of the necessity of speedily adopting the New System and putting it into immediate motion—

Ebenezer Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, New York, 27 July 1788

Oswald, the typographical Cain of Philadelphia, has been confined in Jail since the 15th. Inst.—is to remain there till the 15th. of next Month—& to pay a fine of £10, for *Contempt of the Court*. He & his Friends are trying to make the Public consider this an Attack upon the Liberty of the

Press; but the Design is understood, & nothing on the Subject appears either pro or con, except in his own Paper. He is generally despised.

Benjamin Franklin to Elizabeth Oswald, Philadelphia, c. 3 August 1788

It is to be wished that your prudent Counsel might prevail with him to change that Conduct of his Paper by which he has made and provoked so many Enemies.

Samuel Hodgdon to Timothy Pickering, Philadelphia, 14 August 1788

Oswald is liberated, his paper has for a long time teemed with unmerited abuse, and pieces calculated to inflame yet all remains quiet, and I believe will continue so Maugre his endeavours.

Harrison Gray Otis

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, Quincy, Mass., 28 November 1796

Your Friend Otis is brought forward as a Representative to Congress. He very deservedly shares the confidence of his constituents. His conduct on all those occasions wherein he has been call'd to act, has been Manly firm & consistant. You justly observe that he may be consider'd as a fellow Labourer with you in the Good cause.

John Quincy Adams to Abigail Adams, The Hague, 8 February 1797

My friend Otis, I see succeeds Mr. Ames as representative in Congress for the district of Boston. While I lament that the public should be deprived of Mr. Ames's services, at this early period of his life and from so melancholy an occasion, I rejoice in the hopes that the talents and energy of Otis will be substituted in their stead.—His eloquence, his activity and his firmness will be exerted I am very confident in a good cause, and while he rises to eminence and fame himself he will promote at the same time the honour, the dignity and the true interest of his Country.

John Adams to Abigail Adams, Philadelphia, 30 April 1797

We are told Harri. Otis excelled at Boston and displayed great oratorical Talents.

Mary Cranch to Abigail Adams, Quincy, Mass., 1 April 1798

Mr. Otis & Harpers Speeches are much admir'd by one party & their Wit & Satire felt by the other.

James Otis, Jr.

John Thaxter to John Adams, London, 12 August 1783

The celebrated Mr. Otis is dead. He was killed at his Door in Andover by a stroke of lightning in an instant. For 2 years past he had been very rational & began to do business. He had been rather irregular a few Months before his Death, but had become very steady again just before this fatal Accident—He was once venerated, & his Memory will be ever dear to those, who knew him once to be the Man of Worth & pitied him in his decline as the Wreck of a great Character.

John Adams to James Warren, Paris, 10 September 1783

My Friend Mr. Otis, Seems to have been permitted to see the Building finished which he framed, and then taken away in a manner equally happy and distinguished.—He was a favourite of Nature in his Genius and in his Death.—The History of our Country I hope will do Justice to this great Character.

John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Paris, 10 September 1783

It was with very Affecting sentiments that I learned, the Death of Mr. Otis my worthy Master. Extraordinary in Death as in Life, he has left a Character, which will never die, while the Memory of the American Revolution remains, whose Foundations he laid, with an Ennergy, and with those Masterly Abilities which no other Man possessed.

Thomas Rodney to John Adams, Dover, Del., 20 November 1791

I was but a little over twenty years old when the first Congress met at New York but My brother Cæsar, was able with the proceedings to Communicate to me the knowledge that had been exhibited there and particularly from Mr. *James Otis* of Masichusetts; it was this which first Enlightened and gave my mind a proper direction on this subject. Great Indeed was the Character my brother gave Mr. Otis. He considered him as the Luminary of that August Assembly—And that he there Exhibited that light which afterwards was reflected from various stars in different parts of the Continent.

John Adams to Benjamin Rush, Quincy, Mass., 23 April 1807

Mr James Otis was a great Schollar, a great Philosopher a great Mathematician, a great Lawyer, a great Politician who possessed the most commanding oratorical Powers of any Man I ever knew. He was the first assertor at the Bar in the Legislature and in Print of the Rights of the Colonies against the unjust unconstitutional and illegal Claims of the British Parliament. He conducted the Town of Boston which was the great Wheel on which the Politicks of the Massachusetts Bay and the whole Continent turned from the year 1760 to the year 1770, during which ten years the Principles of the Revolution were introduced, propagated and established through the Colonies; with a Wisdom, Caution and Fortitude that no other Man possessed. He ruined his Health and injured his Fortune by his Exertions, and at last loss his Reason. Heaven in compassion to him, I hope Struck him dead with a Flash of Lightning, and though his Body did not ascend like the Prophet

in Car of fire, He went to Heaven in as short a time and with as much Ease. Justice has never been done him in American History and never will be done him.

John Adams to William Tudor, Sr., Quincy, Mass., 5 June 1813

“I write no biographies or biographical sketches. I give only hints. James Otis was descended from our most ancient families. His education was the best his country afforded. He was bred to the bar under Mr. Gridley, the greatest lawyer and the greatest classic scholar I ever knew at any bar. His application was incessant and indefatigable. Justice Richard Dana has often told me, that the apartment in which Otis studied, when a pupil and a clerk of Mr. Gridley, was near his house; that he had watched him from day to day, and that he had never known a student in law so punctual, so steady, so constant and persevering. Accordingly, as soon as he was admitted to the bar, he became a conspicuous figure. And among whom? Gridley, Pratt, Trowbridge, and he was much admired, and as much celebrated as any of them. His generous, manly, noble character as a private gentleman, his uncommon attainments in literature, especially in the law, and his nervous, commanding eloquence at the bar, were every where spoken of. The government soon discerned his superiority, and commissioned him Advocate General. He married a lady who in that day was esteemed a fortune. From 1755 to 1758, I heard my master, Colonel James Putnam of Worcester, who was a critical judge, and Mr. Trowbridge, the then attorney general, and his lady, constantly speaking of Otis as the greatest, the most learned, the most manly and the most honest young man of his age. All this was before I had ever seen Mr. Otis. I never saw him till late in the autumn of 1758, nor Mr. Samuel Adams till after that year.

“To sum up, in a few words. The two young men whom I have known to enter the stage of life with the most luminous, unclouded prospects and the best founded hopes, were James Otis and John Hancock. They were both essential to the Revolution, and both fell sacrifices to it.

Thomas McKean to John Adams, Philadelphia, 20 August 1813

In the congress of 1765 there were several conspicuous characters: Mr. James Otis appeared to me to be the boldest and best speaker.—I voted for him as our President, but Brigadier Ruggles succeeded by one vote, owing to the number of the committee from New-York, as we voted individually.

John Adams to William Dirt, Quincy, Mass., 5 January 1818

The resistance to the British system for subjugating the colonies, began in 1760, and in the month of February 1761, James Otis electrified the town of Boston, the province of Massachusetts Bay, and the whole continent, more than Patrick Henry ever did in the whole course of his life. If we must have panegyric and hyperbole, I must say, that if Mr. Henry was Demosthenes and Mr. Richard Henry Lee, Cicero, James Otis was Isaiah and Ezekiel united.

Samuel A. Otis

Samuel A. Otis to Nathanael Greene, Boston, 7 September 1779

I never expect to be out of debt, am not too proud to be obliged; but I wish to pay off some Scores, and shall therefore hint from time to time such matters as may in my opinion be beneficial. I have several years been an underwriter, and some small savings have been made in that way; as I have a degree of Credit both in the Boston and Newbury office, I hint the writing for you upon such Policies only as I take myself.

Abigail Adams (Nabby) to Elizabeth Cranch, 27 January 1783

Mr. Otis is as agreeable in his domestick line as in other company, more so I think, and our breakfast is ever pleasant and agreeable, enlivened in general by some very civil speeches, for you know he is an adept.

Royall Tyler to Abigail Adams, post-7 October 1785

The Land Tax &c. is Collected with great Difficulty, whilst the Impost has driven many Vessels, with the most valuable Cargoes; from the Entrance of our Ports, to the other States. The Failure of the Merchants Traders &c. is so common at B[oston] that it has Ceased in great Measure to be Disreputable. Scarce a Week passes without one or more persons shutting their Doors against their Creditors; and no man will venture to Scandalize that Situation, which may be his own or his most Intimate Friends on the morrow. . . . I shall however particularize Two persons of your Acquaintance who have lately failed. . . .

The other is Mr. S. A. O[tis] Father to Harry O: who studies the Law under Mr. L[owell]. He failed about Six Weeks past to the great surprise of his Friends and the Publick. His Debts are owed chiefly in England, and it is said amount to Forty Thousand pounds Sterling. I have seen a List which may be depended upon that carries them, to Thirty Thousand pounds Lawful money. This List only included the Large Demands. It is said, however, that he has charged upon his Books to the amount of ten Thousand pounds Lawful money more than sufficient to Discharge his Debts. He will, I dare say, think that he does well if he can Balance his Accompts even with the World and begin anew. The United States are Indebted to him Eight Thousand Pounds being the Balance of his C——s Accompts.

Samuel Nasson to George Thatcher, Sanford, Maine, 26 February 1788

. . . my Friend Oatis whom I esteem as a Honest man.

Otto's Biographies, Fall 1788

Wise and moderate; of an extremely simple exterior and even niggardly, but well-educated and experienced. According to appearance, a friend of France having been a member of Congress during the war.

Samuel Phillips, Jr., to Benjamin Goodhue, 1789

Mr. Otis appears to have lost all sense of decency & modesty—if he complains of starving on his present Salary, let him return to Massachusetts & make half that money if he can—it is possible some other person may be found equal in capacity & merit—I am sure there are hundreds of very worthy men, who have had the advantages of education, & can plead as great sacrifices in the public cause, as some who make a great bustle about it, have really made, that would think themselves happy with $\frac{2}{3}$ the sum he has, or at most with $\frac{3}{4}$ of it.

Samuel A. Otis to James Madison, New York, 4 February 1789

The notice you have been pleased to honor me with I hope will apologize for this freedom upon a subject quite personal. I had the fairest prospect when I parted from you of an election for one of the Districts of Massachusetts [for U.S. Representative], but as my life has been clouded with disappointment I failed here also in my expectations. I however contemplated the object rather as a precarious means of *subsistence*, my commercial prospects being at an end by a train of misfortunes, than as an object of ambition, *which* now bounds my wishes, & I presume if my interest was so good as to obtain the Clerkship of either House it might keep me in view for something better hereafter, give me present employment, or perhaps a decent present support. My friends encourage me with *that* of the Senate but doubtless I shall have many competitors. I am unknown to both Mr. Grayson or Mr. Lee could I obtain their Countenance it would greatly facilitate my views. I shall say nothing of my own merits, but let my pretensions speak for themselves. With those who know me I stand fair. With you Sir I have the highest confidence my application will meet with candor if not success.

Elbridge Gerry to Richard Henry Lee, Cambridge, Mass., 9 February 1789

Our friend the Hon. Mr. Otis wishes to fill the office of secretary of the Senate, and that from a long acquaintance with him, I think him, as well on account of his early attachment to the cause of America, previous to the war, and of his services during it, as of his diligence, integrity, and abilities, a candidate who will do the highest honor and justice to the office, if conferred on him. Indeed I most sincerely wish it, because he is amongst the number of unfortunates who have suffered by the war, and has an expensive but worthy family. If he should not succeed in this, which I hope he will, perhaps you may promote some other appointment, which will be equally beneficial to him.

Benjamin Goodhue to Samuel Phillips, Jr., New York, 11 August 1789

Otis, much to his shame after being by our interest provided with a living, has hinted that We wish to starve him.*

*Otis had been appointed secretary of the U.S. Senate.

William Maclay: Journal, 29 August 1789

I know What a Wretch Otis is.

William Maclay: Journal, 30 August 1789

I before knew him to be a Villain.

Samuel A. Otis to John Adams, Washington, 16 December 1801

Congress have as you see commenced their Session and the daily papers give you a view of their business. I expected opposition to my continuance in office but was agreeably disappointed. Not a word was said nor do I think any injury was wished except amongst the Hamiltonians, you recollect King Ellsworth & the set who originally opposed me. And I think there is some of the same unfriendly influence discoverable—Not amongst the Repubs—for having a strong majority they could at any moment have turned me out. They can now—But it would have disgraced any party. I have done my duty punctually, unremittedly & for a paltry compensation—which but for advanced age and misfortunes I should dispise. I always thot myself degraded by the appointment and but that I supposed it a stepping stone to something better would never have been an object of solicitude. My time of life now and other circumstances, preclude any higher views, and I therefore avail myself of the office as a meer item of subsistence.

John Adams to Samuel A. Otis, Quincy, Mass., 26 January 1802

I congratulate you on your continuance in your office. It would not have raised the reputation of any sett of men to have made unnecessary changes in such kinds of offices. Even in England where party and self have at least as much energy as they have here removals are uncommon in the army navy revenue as well as in the subordinate officers in the great departments. The Marquis of Carmathen introduced to me Mr. Frazier an under Secretary of State and afterwards said to me that Mr. Frazier was the cleverest man in England, that in all the changes in administration he had remained in office since the Duke of Newcastle's time above thirty years. I don't mean by this to say that you are the cleverest man in the United States, but I will say you are so clever that it would have been ungenerous, indiscrete in the present majority to have removed you.

William Plumer: Memorandum, 2 February 1807

The Secretary is now past sixty years of age. He has a salary of \$2000 pr annum. Tarries at this city but a *very few* days longer than Congress. His compensation is nearly double to that of a senator. His duty is easy—he has always, at the least, two clerks under him, who discharge, by far the greatest part, of his duty, as secretary. To the principal Clerk \$1300, & to the other \$1000 pr annum salary is given.

His office is not kept in the most regular manner. In vain do you look for a set of even those documents that have been printed. Although he has been secretary from the first so negligent has he been as not to have a single full set for the office.

His records are kept in a blind confused manner. In his *secret* journals are documents that are *public*. He is timid to a fault. A few years since to *one* in the minority he was afraid to entrust anything—To one in the majority he would trust everything. He has refused me papers to carry to my chamber—and has afterwards privately requested me to desire some Senator to call on him for them—& then for me to borrow them from that Senator. Such conduct is mean & despicable—but as my object was information I never would appear to notice it—Especially as *I knew* he did not distrust my integrity. But was influenced by fear of losing his office.

With all his clerks his office is neglected—& the official communications made to the Senate for several years are not yet recorded.

Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Quincy, Mass., 5 May 1814

Mr. Otis was a most pleasant companion, both at home and abroad.

When at Philadelphia, I lived in constant habits of intimacy, and Friendly intercourse with the Family, and was witness to the cheerfulness and urbanity of his manners, which in public Life secured him against the shafts of malice. He was always moderate, and never imposed his own opinions upon those who dissented from him upon political Questions. He was firm in his own, and decided, but left others the same Liberty, accordingly for twenty-five years that he acted as Secretary to the Senate of the United States, amidst all the conflicts of party, he retained, the Love and Esteem of that Body.

I need not say to you, who so well know his Character, that he adorned the Doctrine which he professed, as a Christian Liberal, candid, and Charitable.

His uniform habits of temperance and sobriety and uninterrupted Health, gave him a vigor, which promised a much longer duration, and made him dear to his Family and Friends, few of the infirmities of Age were discoverable in him. His loss will be most heavily felt, by his partner and his dear daughters.

Senator Otis?

John Quincy Adams to John Adams, Ealing, England, 29 October 1816

Since beginning this Letter, I have received yours of 26. August and 5. September, and am highly gratified by your and my Mother's Account of your social party at Judge Otis's—Among the lights and shades of that worthy Senator's character, there is none which shews him in brighter colours than his hospitality. In the course of nearly thirty years that I have known him, and throughout the range of experience that I have had in that time, it has not fallen to my lot to meet a man more skilled in the useful art of entertaining his friends than Otis; and among the many admirable talents that he possesses, there is none that I should have been more frequently, and more strongly prompted to Envy; if the natural turn of my disposition had been envious—Of those qualities Otis has many—His Person, while in Youth, his graceful Deportment, his sportive wit, his quick intelligence, his eloquent fluency, always made a strong impression upon my Mind; while his warm domestic Affections, his active Friendship, and his Generosity always commanded my esteem—This tribute is due from me to him, after the remarks which I made to you in a former Letter upon some of his less estimable characteristics—I think his Politics have never been founded upon steady principle—I believe he has countenanced and supported measures of the most fatal import, which his conscience did not approve, from the want of mental energy; and I know that from a very early date he has personally been afflicted with the feelings of a rival towards me. A vague and general feeling of rivalry; for I never stood in the way of his wishes for any particular Object.—It was so with poor Bayard, in a much greater degree, and with less reason—Mrs Otis is and always has been a charming woman; and I am very glad you have seen them both in the place where all others they appear to the greatest advantage—their own house.

John Quincy Adams to Abigail Adams, Ealing, England, 4 November 1816

Your account of your party with my father, at Mr Otis's gave me great pleasure. Of the qualities that constitute the charm of social intercourse I have never known any persons possessed in a higher degree than Mr and Mrs. Otis. I ascribe their civilities and polite attentions to you to the best of motives, and they have my sincere and cordial gratitude for them.

Louis-Guilliam Otto

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, New York, 19 January 1786

I have also been much pleas'd with an acquaintance with Mr. Otto. He hath made an impression here very flattering to himself & favorable to the Idea you entertain of him.

Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, Paris, 17 June 1786

He is good humoured, affectionate to America, will see things in a friendly light when they admit of it, in a rational one always, and will not pique himself on writing every trifling circumstance of irritation to his court. I wish you to be acquainted with him, as a friendly intercourse between individuals who do business together produces a mutual spirit of accomodation useful to both parties. It is very much our interest to keep up the affection of this country for us, which is considerable.

Daniel Owen

Henry Marchant to John Adams, Newport, R.I., 7 March 1790

The Deputy Governor Owens, President of the [Rhode Island] Convention, did not hesitate to say out of Doors, that an Adjournment of the Convention was necessary to insure their Election—He is proposed for Governor [John] Collins having been their weak Tool long enough—Owen is a Man of more Subtlety, a profound Hypocrite—at the General Assembly after the vote for calling a Convention; He took me by the Hand, and although He had voted against it, He declared I could not more rejoice than He did.